

A Plea For
RECONSTRUCTION
OF
INDIAN POLITY

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“.....may it be reserved to India to evolve the true science of democracy by giving a visible demonstration.”

—MAHATMA GANDHI

FOREWORD

IT was nearly two years ago, some time after the Mysore Gramdan Conference, that I had occasion to discuss with certain eminent political leaders the question of indirect elections. I had found a very favourable response and was encouraged to put down my ideas on paper.

Public work in India is so wasteful of time because of its utter lack of system, and my own habits of work are so unsystematic that I had not been able until now to do this.

The ideas and proposals herein expressed are in the nature of tentative suggestions to serve as a basis for discussion.

While I have been influenced a great deal by Gandhiji's ideas on the subject, I should like to make it clear that what follows is not bound to any particular ideology or school of thought.

First of all, it is necessary to emphasise that the issue before us cannot be narrowed down merely to that of a better electoral system than the present one. The issue is a much more comprehensive one, namely, that of the nature of the polity most suitable for us at this juncture. Further, it is also necessary to remember that polity, whatever its nature, does not function in a vacuum, but has to fit into the larger social entity and subserve the larger social purpose.

I propose in this paper to describe the main outline of the polity which to my mind is not only most suited for us but also most rational and scientific, with a brief statement of the reasons for my views.

I have pleaded for our present political institutions to

be based on the principles that had been enunciated and practised in the ancient Indian polity, because (a) I believe that would be in the line with the natural course of social evolution and (b) those principles are more valid from the point of view of social science than any others.

Present Western polity is based upon an atomised society, the State being made up of an inorganic sum of individuals. This is both against the social nature of man and the scientific organisation of society. Ancient Indian polity was much more consistent with these both.

Let me make clear that this paper is not a treatise on democracy or government. I am dealing here with a practical and immediate question : what should be the principles and form of Indian polity at the present time.

I have not looked at this question from the point of view of any ready-made pre-conceptions and have avoided giving any label to the views expressed here. Even the name, communitarian, was reluctantly used, because a descriptive term some times became unavoidable. My search here has been for the forms of social life, particularly of political life, that would assure the preservation of human values about which there is hardly any dispute in the world today; and my approach has been non-partisan and non-sectarian.

My colleagues in the Sarvodaya movement might miss the word, 'sarvodaya' in this paper. But, I hope they will recognise that the goal of this enquiry is nothing else but the ultimate good and rise of all. At the same time, I should like to remind them that I have not been concerned here with the ultimate state of things, but with the next immediate step towards a better way of life. Furthermore, my enquiry has been mainly confined to the political field.

This paper is, of course, ultimately addressed to the people of India, but immediately and chiefly to the political leaders and their parties. I am conscious that for active and busy persons this paper is perhaps too long. But I felt I could not put my view-point effectively in shorter space. The paper has been prepared in haste; and it has been impossible for me to bestow upon it the thought and study that were required. However, such as it is, I do earnestly hope that it will receive sympathetic consideration of the leaders, the parties, the press and the public.

The general political situation in the country, the state of party organizations, the falling standards of public conduct, the partisan conflicts at a time when a common endeavour was called for have all combined to produce a pre-disposition in the public mind to bring a fresh approach to bear upon national and international questions. I hope the more, therefore, that the prevailing questioning and experimenting mood would help further dispassionate consideration of the plea made here in all humility and earnestness.

The paper is divided into seven chapters. Each chapter is more or less independent; and, on that account, there will be found repetition in places. The paper opens with 'Some General Considerations' in order to put the question of democracy in perspective. The next chapter takes us to India of the past and digs out a Sign-Post to guide us in the future. In Chapter III, I deal with the Indian village communities of old so as to refresh the memory of the reader and provide, ready at hand, a standard of reference. In 'Social Nature of Man' I discuss the central point of the paper, the nature of the community, its destruction in the West and the principles of its reconstruction. I deal then with the failings of Parlia-

mentary Democracy so as to take bearings from our present location. In order to elucidate the nature of polity advocated here, I have briefly dealt in the next chapter with the Economy of the Community. In the last chapter I have brought together the argument and presented an outline scheme for the Reconstruction of Indian Polity.

On the very portals of democracy—irrespective of its form and structure—are words written that can never be wiped off, without wiping off democracy itself. No kind of democracy can exist without the democratic freedoms—freedom of conscience, of association, of expression—and the Rule of Law. Where these freedoms do not exist, nor the Rule of Law, there can be no democracy. For my enquiry here I take these words as axiomatic and inscribe them in bold letters on the door-way before entering the house of Indian democracy.

Patna,
September, 1959.

Jayprakash Narayan

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by this formula 'Government of the people by an elite sprung from the people.' (the author's italics).¹

Consider again the following : "The extreme case of political democracy is that in which people govern themselves directly, making the laws, dispensing justice, and (although this is more difficult) carrying out or overseeing the administrative functions. But no such democracy ever existed, or ever will so long as men live together in large political units. Inevitably, then, political democracy must be translated into law and representative government. Democracy does not assume that the 'people' actually govern themselves, and its theory makes plenty of room for leadership. Democracy in Western usage stands for the free conflict of ideas and leaders, from among which the electorate makes a choice. In these terms, political democracy as a unique method may be defined in one proposition : the ability of a people to choose and dismiss a government. To call anything else political democracy is only to abuse words."²

These are strong words from wise and learned authorities, but I doubt if they will serve for all times. It might be said that the farthest democracy has advanced in the West is elected oligarchy. Western democracy may, therefore, be called not democracy but *democratic oligarchy*.

It is questionable, however, if the 'people' will remain permanently satisfied with such a situation. It may also be asked if the world-wide totalitarian assault on democracy does not acquire a point and a relevance on account of the

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1. Maurice Duverget : Political Parties, pp.423-24-25, London, English Edition, 1954.
 2. H. B. Mayo, Democracy & Marxism, p.256, Oxford University Press, 1955.

fact that the peoples of the democracies do not experience the glow and satisfaction of self-government.

It is further questionable if democrats of all times and climes, social idealists and thinkers, the spirit of man itself will ever remain satisfied with the current Western definition of democracy. Already, I believe, all these elements have combined—the thinkers, the idealists, the people, the spirit of man—to demand a more satisfying *participating* democracy. Indeed, it is my firm belief that to the extent to which democracy becomes truly participative, to that extent would the onrush of totalitarianism be stemmed and even rolled backwards.

Therefore, while bowing my head to scholarship and learning, and also while remembering that the ideal could never be fully realised, I am for ever pressing forward with the quest for democracy and for discovering the ways and means by which more and more people could *govern themselves* more and more.

II

Let me now turn, as a part of this quest, to the formulation of some general considerations about democracy.

(1) First of all, let it be pointed out that the problem of democracy is basically, and above all, a moral problem. Constitutions, systems of government, parties, elections—all these are relevant to the business of democracy. But unless the moral and spiritual qualities of the people are appropriate, the best of constitutions and political systems will not make democracy work. The moral qualities and mental attitudes most needed for democracy are :

(1) concern for truth; (2) aversion to violence; (3) love of liberty and courage to resist oppression and tyranny; (4) spirit of co-operation; (5) preparedness to adjust self-interest to the larger interest; (6) respect for other's opinions and tolerance; (7) readiness to take responsibility; (8) belief in the fundamental equality of man; (9) faith in the educability of human nature.

These qualities and attitudes are not in-born in man. But he can be educated in them and trained to acquire and practise them. This task, let it be emphasised, is beyond the scope of the State. The quality of the life of society should itself be such that it inculcates these values in its members. The prevailing social ethics, the family, the religious and educational authorities and institutions, the example that the elite set in their own lives, the organs of public opinion—all these have to combine to create the necessary moral climate for democracy to thrive. Thus, it should be clear that the task of preparing the very soil in which the plant of democracy may take root and grow is not a political but an educative task.¹

2. While the above moral qualities and attitudes have

Cf. Merriam & Gosness : "It is as true now as in the days of Jefferson that education is the foundation of democracy; only we now come to recognize that this must be a social education, including the business of living with others in the great co-operative enterprise of democracy, and that it must begin early. Social and political education must begin in the schools, not at the polls. If this education stops with the schools, it is likely to be sterile, but it can be continued through the adult period, and it doubtless will be in a certain measure, not in the formal style of "schooling", but in the broader process by which society educates itself—through discussion, criticism, construction and reconstruction, organization of community intelligence." (The American Party System, p. 503.)

been treated in the abstract, without reference to any particular society in space or time, I should like briefly to deal with one particular moral attitude that seems to be peculiarly relevant to the fate of democracy in modern society.

The present is *par excellence* a materialist age; and whether it is capitalism, socialism or communism, it is the material values that over-shadow all other values of life. Man is a mixture of matter and spirit—to use these words in their popular sense—and every man has material needs that have to be satisfied. In that sense every man cannot help but be a materialist. But if the material needs become unlimited and the over-riding activity of mankind becomes an unending endeavour to satisfy the insatiable hunger for more and yet more, there is an imbalance established in human affairs and life becomes wholly materialistic. This is exactly the situation in the West, in spite of its adherence, in large part, to Christianity, one of the noblest spiritual ways of life.

All this may appear to be irrelevant to the question of democracy. I emphatically hold to the contrary, because it seems patent to me that democracy cannot co-exist with the insatiable hunger for more and more material goods that modern industrialism—capitalist, socialist or communist—has created. I believe that for man really to enjoy liberty and freedom and to practise self-government, it is necessary voluntarily to limit his wants. Otherwise, the greed for more and yet more will lead to mutual conflict, coercion, spoliation, war; and also to a system of production that will be so complex as to bind democracy hand and foot and deliver it to a bureaucratic oligarchy.

Shri Pyarelal writes in his monumental, *The Last Phase* :
 “Whilst it is a truism that democracy and freedom cease to have any meaning to a people who lacks the elementary

necessaries of life, it is not less true that hankering more and more after worldly goods becomes a hindrance to democracy and can only be satisfied at the cost of individual freedom. The system of mass production, which a desire to have more and more of material goods has brought into being, has created a 'baffing vastness' in society in which the individual gets lost....A new ruling class of powerful executives in an individualistic order and of politicians, planners, specialists and bureaucrats under planned economy thus springs up. Privilege returns under a new face. Equality is sacrificed to the pursuit of abundance."¹

Pyarelalji adds : "Gandhiji did not despise economic progress. On the contrary he went so far as to say that to the starving God can appear only as bread and butter. 'For the poor the economic is the spiritual'.....Only he refused to make the multiplication of material wants the sole criterion of progress, or to put the material before the moral when there was a conflict between the two."²

It is undeniable that there is a conflict to-day between two values of life, namely, between wanting more goods and wanting more freedom. Those, however, who believe in freedom should have no difficulty in making the choice. In a poor country like India the masses may not yet be faced with this choice, but in the form of an ideal of life, the choice before India is as real as before Europe or America.

Which of the two choices India will make, not depend upon Parliament or any type of political action, but among other things, upon the example that the elite of society will set in their personal lives.

1 Pyarelal, *the Last Phase*, p. 577, Navjivan, 1958.

2 Pyarelal *op cit*, pp. 577-78.

3. This issue of voluntary limitation of wants has another fundamental significance for democracy. In the democratic countries the cry is becoming stronger against the growing power of the State and against state-ism generally. This is a justifiable cry and democrats will have every sympathy with it. But it is interesting to observe how in this matter the pendulum has swung from one side to the other. When the foundations of modern democracy were being laid, it was the doctrine of free enterprise and individualism that ruled supreme. Adam Smith, its greatest philosopher, declared that "By each man following his own individual interest with the minimum of restriction, the public wealth will be best promoted."¹

But as Pyarelalji has pointed out : "Glaring economic inequalities and other evils of unrestrained competition under capitalistic individualism have since caused the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction and the necessity of State action to mitigate these evils has come to be universally recognised. But experience has shown that once the State begins to interfere it is led, by the very logic of its action, to regulate more and more of the people's lives and activities, and those who stand for democratic values, faced with 'the competitive efficiency of their totalitarian rivals', are forced either to 'adopt totalitarian methods of control' or else, 'by clinging to outworn democratic forms.....yield position after position.'"²

Here we have perhaps the most difficult question that democracy faces today : the question as to how to resolve the following dilemma : when there is liberty it leads to abuse

1 Quoted by Shri Pyarelal, op. cit, p. 576

2 Shri Pyarelal, op. cit. p. 576

and necessitates State interference, and when there is State interference it leads to curtailment of liberty. How then to reserve liberty and prevent its abuse? There are no political means by which the dilemma can be resolved, there are only moral means. The obverse side of the medal of liberty is responsibility. If the individual is not prepared to take social responsibility, if he uses liberty for self-aggrandisement and neglects or hurts the interests of others, some form or another of state-ism becomes inevitable. It is here that the pertinence and wisdom of Gandhiji's concept of trusteeship becomes evident. The only democratic answer to stateism and totalitarianism is trusteeship. But trusteeship cannot be practised without voluntary limitation of wants. An individual cannot function as a trustee unless he is prepared to share his possessions with his fellow men : this he cannot do unless he has learned to curtail his wants. Thus voluntary limitation of wants, in other words, the rejection of materialism and the unlimited pursuit of material satisfactions, is essential for the achievement and preservation of democracy.

(4) Here we are likely to come up against the economists and their "science" of Economics. For, it might be pointed out that the "laws" of economic growth cannot be by-passed, that economic development must take its natural course, that science and technology cannot be denied. But it is necessary to remember that present-day Economics is a science of a particular type of society which is ruled by a particular philosophy of life—the philosophy which we have just considered, namely, the philosophy of unlimited material progress. It is conceivable that there may be other "science" of Economics, pertaining to other types of societies, and ruled by other social philosophies.

Let this should appear as hair-brained nonsense, let me

bring to my aid a trained and eminent Western economist, Dr. E. F. Schumacher, Economic Adviser to the National Coal Board of Great Britain. Dr. Schumacher is a socialist and member of the Socialist Union (London) that published a few years ago that excellent study, *20th Century Socialism*, which has exerted considerable influence on European and Asian socialism. Dr. Schumacher was for some time Economic Adviser to the Burma Government and while in Rangoon he had prepared a lecture on 'Economics in a Buddhist Country.' The lecture has not been published but Dr. Schumacher has been so kind as to send me a copy. I consider this lecture to be of such importance that I not only quote from it, but also reproduce the whole of it as an appendix, and I strongly recommend it to all those who may read this paper.

"What today is looked upon as *the* science of Economics is based on *one* particular outlook on life, on one only, the outlook of the Materialist. ...Economics as a science has arisen only in the West and at a time when Western Materialism ruled supreme throughout the world. Non-materialists have been too weak, so far, to think these matters out from their own point of view. ...The essence of Materialism is not its concern with material wants, but the total absence of any idea of Limit or Measure. ...Economics, as taught today throughout the world—before the iron curtain and behind,—recognises no limit of any kind. It is therefore the Economics of Materialism and nothing else. There is implicit in it a purely materialist view of life, and it is inseparable from this view of life. ...When will the teachers of Economics begin to be at least objective enough to tell their students that the Economics of present-day teaching is the purest form of Materialism and leaves no room for any thing other. When will they take cognizance and admit that other systems

of Economics are possible and necessary and are even already available in rudimentary form ? I can here mention only one such teaching, propounded by the greatest man of our age, Mahatma Gandhi. Are the professors and students of Economics even aware of Gandhi as an economist ? And yet he had much to say on economic matters; he has laid the foundation for a system of Economics that would be compatible with Hinduism and, I believe, with Buddhism too... At this stage, when the non-materialists are still so very weak and so very trusting, it is merely my concern to plead with the professors and students of Economics—and with the statesmen as well—that they should study and listen to the Mahatma's economics with as much attention as they now give exclusively to the Economics of Materialism."

These excerpts will not convey the whole idea of Dr. Schumacher—for which his whole lecture will have to be read—but they are enough to support my view that the present science of Economics, and the so-called "laws" of economic growth need not over-awe us into neglecting to seek a better way of life and to adjust economy and polity to that way. I do hope that the last sentence of Dr. Schumacher will be heeded at least by the statesmen and economists of Gandhi's India.

(5) It should be remembered that democracy does not consist merely in its formal institutions. It lives really and truly in the life of the people : it is a way of life. It is not only through the representative assemblies and elected governments that democracy works but in an equally true sense through the voluntary associations and actions of the citizens which they carry on and establish to deal with their problems, promote their interests and manage their affairs. Professor Harold Laski, when asked how would he judge the worth of

a democracy replied that he would do so by the amount of voluntary activity within it. Democracy has worked best among peoples that have shown initiative and enterprise. Lord Beveridge writes in the Preface of his *Voluntary Action* (A Report of the Methods of Social Advance) : "In a totalitarian society all action outside the citizen's home, and it may be much that goes on there, is directed or controlled by the State. By contrast, vigour and abundance of Voluntary Action outside one's home, individually and in association with other citizens, for bettering one's own life and that of one's fellows, are the distinguishing marks of a free society." He goes on to say : "It is clear that the State must in future do more things than it has attempted in the past. But it is equally clear, or should be equally clear, that room, opportunity and encouragement must be kept for Voluntary Action in seeking new ways of social advance."¹

(6) Democracy is not merely a question of political rights and people's part in government. Particularly since the First World War, democracy has come to mean more and more social and economic justice, equal opportunity, industrial democracy. The old distinction between political and economic democracy has been given up and the two concepts have been merged into one to mean full democracy. This is not to suggest that democracy is bound up with any such politico-economic ideologies as socialism or communism. It is true that these ideologies had promised full democracy in the sense used above. But experience has shown that in the case of communism, there has been not enlargement but a severe curtailment of democracy—both political and economic. The old belief that State ownership and manage-

1 Lord Beveridge, *Voluntary Action*, p. 10, London, 1949.

But whatever the experience of the working of socialism or communism the fact remains that the concept of democracy does include social economic justice, equal opportunity, industrial democracy *together* with all that is meant by political democracy. And, if communism and socialism have failed so far to lead human society to these goals, the endeavour to reach them must continue to form part of the quest for democracy. It has been indicated above that the answer is moral rather than political or economic.

(7) Democracy is intimately connected with such social institutions and attitudes of mind as are represented by the caste system and the practice of untouchability. A society in which men are considered high, low or untouchable according to the families into which they are born, is very far from being democratic. It is quite a different matter that individuals are endowed at birth with different abilities and aptitudes. That is a biological phenomenon, with which caste has nothing to do. It should be appreciated by every Indian democrat that the system of caste hierarchy and untouchability is the greatest and most stubborn enemy of democracy in this country. At the same time it should also be appreciated that vanquishing of this enemy is, again, not a political but an educative task. It is also, but to a much lesser degree, an economic task. The social stature of the depressed and backward castes will undoubtedly rise with improvement in their economic condition. But it would be a mistake to believe that economic improvement by itself would be sufficient to remove caste distinctions. The economically advanced castes too observe hierarchical distinctions among themselves.

(8) In countries like India that have but recently emerged from foreign rule, the problem of democracy is further

complicated by the fact of economic backwardness and the absence of recent democratic experience or tradition.

The problems of capital formation (which includes the problem of fixing the limits of present consumption and saving), the direction and utilization of labour and resources and similar problems of economic development are obviously capable of easier and quicker solution under dictatorship—communist or any other—than under democracy. This is one reason for the attraction that communism has for the intelligentsia of the backward countries.

Here the people of these countries are faced with a moral choice. Those who have chosen democracy have chosen the higher way of life and have shown that they are more *developed* as human beings than the others who sacrifice things of the spirit for material things.

On closer scrutiny it would appear that under dictatorships the people are compelled to sacrifice on rather false pretenses. Neither in fascist nor communist dictatorships has it been found that the people were given the things for which they were made to sacrifice their freedoms. The economic development of the dictatorship countries aims at *power* rather than peace and prosperity.¹ The standard of

1. Cf. Raymond Aron : "How far should the present generations sacrifice themselves for the benefit of those of the future ? What is the desirable speed of economic development ? These two questions can receive only one political reply : *There is no other direction for the civilization than there is in the future.* (emphasis mine). Only the argument of economic-military power leads to maximising investments in heavy industry at all cost. The priority given to power over consumption is justified by experience (danger of war) not by doctrine. According to the Marxist doctrine one would expect the communists to be inclined rather to raise the standard of

living of the common people in Soviet Russia—even after 42 years of communist dictatorship and despite the phenomenal industrial and economic development—is lower than that of the U. K. or Sweden, considerably lower than that of the U. S. The standard in other communist countries is, of course, still lower, except perhaps in Czechoslovakia.

Incidentally, we have here the key to the understanding of the question of economic development of the backward countries under democratic regimes. If these countries also wish to build for power, they are doomed. Democratic India cannot compete with China at this game. She will either have to give up her democracy or face defeat in her attempt to build for economico-military power.

This is a crucial question for the new democracies to answer : are they going to build for power and war or for peace and happiness. Should the democracies depend upon military power for their defence or upon the forces of peace in the world and the moral strength of their own people ? The least that is expected from a nation that calls Gandhi its Father is that it will refuse to build for power and will build for peace and happiness.

(9) As for the second difficulty mentioned above in the building up of democracy in the backward countries, namely, the absence of *recent* democratic experience or tradition, it must be conceded that this difficulty is serious and real enough. Indeed, some consider it to be so serious as to apprehend the possibility of the rise of dictatorial regimes in these countries.

living of the population than to strengthen their armies." p. 2
 Paper on 'Political Democracy and Social & Economic progress,'
 submitted to the Rhodes International Seminar, 1958.

The recent history of several Asian and African countries shows how justified is this fear.

This fear has induced an acute social thinker like Dr. Daya Krishna to define democracy in these rather negative terms : "Democracy is the devising of ways and means, primarily in the field of politico jural institutions and more fundamentally in the realm of thought and values to check and obstruct and thwart the tendency to tyranny which is ever present as a 'possible possibility' in every society."¹

I agree with Dr. Daya Krishna that "no democracy will survive unless a large part of the people understand and value democracy for its own sake and treat it as a value independent of all other values which a society seeks. This, I suggest, is the biggest failure on the part of the political elites of the different parties in the New States. They take democracy for granted and talk to the people only about the issues with which they are concerned. I suggest that unless people are educated to understand and appreciate the value of democracy for its own sake, there is little hope of securing the minds of men against the lure of utopian totalitarianism which sneaks into dreams by the subtlest propaganda and awes by the crassest exhibition of naked violence that man has yet seen."²

(10) The question may be asked, is there time to inculcate the values of democracy in the minds of the people ? I personally feel that while the danger in India of a dictatorship, military or other, cannot be brushed aside lightly, there is no immediate cause for fear. But, even granting that the time is short and democracy is running a race against it for

its life, what other guarantee there is for the survival of democracy except the people's intelligent appreciation of the values of democracy and their preparedness to fight for the defence of those values ? The only other way to prevent a dictatorship from taking over is to forestall it by setting up another dictatorship—perhaps a “democratic dictatorship” ! That is to say, a dictatorship purposely established by those who believe in democracy in order to save their country from other types of dictatorships that deny the worth and validity of democracy. The dictatorship of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk which has now developed, outwardly at least, into a Western type of democracy and the two-party system may be cited as a good example of this. The present-day dictators from Cairo to Djakarta all profess to be building up democracy in their own dictatorial ways. While there is no need to distrust their motives, it must be admitted that for the time being at least—and no one can tell how long the interregnum will be—democracy has been given up.

In the case of India there are at least three factors of safety : (i) Due to the British connection, the intelligentsia, or a large part of it, was subjected to the influence of British liberal democracy, and later a smaller part of it to British social democracy. (ii) The struggle for independence, particularly because of Gandhiji's leadership, was instrumental in inculcating to some extent the values of democracy in the intelligentsia as well as in the masses. Gandhiji's influence is still considerable on the mass mind and is being re-inforced by Vinobaji. (iii) Even though India has had no democratic traditions in the recent past, democracy had flourished for centuries in many parts of ancient India. This rich tradition could be drawn upon in order to build democracy in the present. I have dealt with this question more fully in Chapter III.

(11) The danger considered above brings to the fore, among other things, the need to strengthen the base of democracy, so that even if some thing went wrong at the top, the base would endure and keep the foundations of democracy secure. This was the virtue of the village councils, the town committees, the trades and artisans' guilds of old. Kingdoms and empires rose and fell, conquerors came and went, but these organs of popular democracy, that drew their sanctions from the people of their own spheres and not from the central State, went on. Apart from the spiritual unity and way of life, it was these grass-root democratic institutions that have been responsible for the continuity of Indian society and culture.¹ I deal below more fully with the question of building these basic structures of democracy.

III

Thus we see that democracy—to use an idiom of Mathematics—is a 'function' of so many factors, the resultant of so many different activities. There is no single human or

1. Cf. Sri Aurobindo : "The ancient nations", contemporaries of India, and many younger both than she are dead and only their monuments left behind them. Greece and Egypt exist only on the map and in name, for it is not the soul of Hellas or the deeper nation-soul that built Memphis which we now find at Athens or at Cairo. Rome is perished a political and a purely outward cultural unity on the Mediterranean peoples, but their living spiritual and cultural organism she could not create, and therefore the East broke away from the West, Africa left no inheritance of the Roman interlude, and even the Western nations still called Latin could offer no living resistance to barbarian invasions and had to be reborn by the infusion of a foreign vitality to become modern Italy, Spain and France. But India still lives and keeps the continuity of her ancient soul as a living and gifted with the India of the past" (op. cit. p. 42).

social activity by which democracy is created. The house of democracy has many mansions and many types of bricks, other materials and builders are needed to construct it. It is a pity that this is not realised more widely in this country. Otherwise there would not have been such an obsession with politics and other activities could have been consciously undertaken for the building of democracy.

Having set the question of Indian democracy in this larger setting, I wish now to turn to the consideration of the appropriate formal structures that democracy, to my mind, should require in this country to function and develop properly.

CHAPTER 2 THE SIGN-POST FROM THE PAST

I

IT is well-known that the literature on the political and economic institutions of Ancient and Medieval India is rather scanty. Scholars, however, have gathered and pieced together enough material to give us a fairly reliable picture of Indian polity.

I believe a study of this polity and of its relation to the whole ensemble of Indian life and culture should be useful, nay, essential for the determination of present political institutions. Political thought has, of course, developed much farther since those days, and new political institutions, such as those of parliamentary democracy, have been fashioned; and we must learn from this literature and experience. But the implantation of any idea or institutions that is not adapted to the native soil or grafted upon the roots of our life will not bear fruit or contribute to the organic and healthy growth of the body politic.

Indian society has passed through all manner of vicissitudes in the course of its thousands of years of history. But the spirit of India has persisted through them and the main stream of her life has flown uninterruptedly. At times, the stream disappeared underground, but as in the case of her many subterranean rivers, the limpid waters of India's unbroken life flowed unbroken under the inert sand of defeat and decline.

India is emerging presently from another of such melancholy periods of her history. Therefore, the builders of the future India should take care to explore the hidden founts of her eternal life and go to them for real sustenance. The political institutions that we build today should harmonise with the eternal spirit of India and nurture the founts that have kept her alive.

It may appear irrelevant to some to look to ancient India for sign-posts to guide us on the road to *democracy*. But India was perhaps the earliest home of democracy and some of her republics had lasted as long as a thousand years.¹ And though kingship and monarchy were the predominant form of Indian polity, kings in the earlier times were elected by and subject to the *Kshatriya* aristocracy. Even when hereditary kingship became the rule and the Samitis ceased to function, the village and town communities, the merchants' and artisans' guilds, the *varna* order, the *dharma*, or social ethics, continued to function independently of the central State—with which, indeed, the latter did rarely interfere—and to provide a stable, democratic basis for Indian polity. The democracy of the village communities was so stable and efficient that it continued well into the British period. Therefore, far from being irrelevant to the question of democracy, the ancient polity of India, particularly its underlying principles, should be of the utmost value to us in building up our democracy in the present.

1. "It would be difficult, therefore, to decide in what country democracy first appeared. Nor would it be much easier to find the oldest republic. *The choice would be perhaps between various states of northern India.*" (italics mine) p. 168, C. Northcote Parkinson, *The Evolution of Political Thought*.

II

In his luminous essays on Indian Polity Sri Aurobindo, with that extraordinary, intuitive sweep of his vision, has laid bare the true nature of the foundations of Indian polity: I offer no apologies for quoting him extensively. He writes : "The one principle permanent at the base of construction throughout all the building and extension and rebuilding of the Indian polity was the principle of an organically self-determining communal life,—self-determining not only in the mass and by means of the machinery of the vote and a representative body erected on the surface, representative only of the political mind of a part of the nation, which is all that the modern system has been able to manage, but in every pulse of its life and in each separate member of its existence. A free synthetic communal order was its character, and the condition of liberty it aimed at was not so much an individual as a communal freedom."¹

He goes on to add : "In the beginning the problem was simple enough as only two kinds of communal units had to be considered, the village and the clan, tribe or small regional people. The free organic life of the first was founded on the system of the self-governing village community and it was done with such sufficiency and solidity that it lasted down almost to our own days resisting all the wear and tear of time and the inroad of other systems and was only recently steamrollered out of existence by the ruthless and life-less machinery of the British bureaucratic system. ...It was the inadequacy of this system for all but the simplest form of

1. Sri Aurobindo : *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 324.
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Indian Edition, 1959.

agricultural and pastoral life and all but the small people living within a very limited area that compelled the problem of the evolution of a more complex communal system and a modified and more intricate application of the fundamental Indian principle. The agricultural and pastoral life common at first to all the members of the Aryan community, *krstayah*, remained always the large basis, but it developed an increasingly rich superstructure of commerce and industry and numerous arts and crafts and a smaller superstructure of specialised military and political and religious and learned occupations and functions. The village community remained throughout the stable unit, the firm grain or indestructible atom of the social body, but there grew up a group life of tens and hundreds of villages, each under its head and needing its administrative organisation, and these, as the clan grew into a large people by conquest or coalition with others, became constituents of a kingdom or a confederated republican nation, and these again the circles, *mandala*, of larger kingdoms and finally of one or more great empires.”¹

Further on Sri Aurobindo writes : “The test of the Indian genius for socio-political construction lay in the successful application of its principle of a communal self-determined freedom and order to suit this growing development and new order of circumstances. The Indian mind evolved, to meet this necessity, the stable socio-religious system of the four orders. Outwardly this might seem to be only a more rigid form of the familiar social system developed naturally in most human peoples at one time or another, a priesthood, a military and political aristocracy, a class of artisans and free agriculturalists and traders and a proletariat of serfs or

1. Sri Aurobindo : op. cit., pp. 396-97.

labourers. The resemblance however is only in the externals and the spirit of the system of *Chaturvarna* was different in India. In the later Vedic and the epic times the fourfold order was at once and inextricably the religious, social, political and economic framework of the society and within that framework each order had its natural portion and in none of the fundamental activities was the share or position of any of them exclusive. This characteristic is vital to an understanding of the ancient system, but has been obscured by false notions formed from a misunderstanding or an exaggeration of later phenomena and of conditions mostly belonging to the decline. ...The four orders grew into a fixed social hierarchy, but, leaving aside the status of the out-castes, each had attached to it a spiritual life and utility, a certain social dignity, an education, a principle of social and ethical honour and a place and duty and right in the communal body."

III

These essays were written many years ago and the main basis for them was Dr. Jayaswal's pioneering researches in Indian polity. Later research shows that several of Jayaswal's conclusions had been hastily drawn.¹ But these have neither affected the broad generalizations of Dr. Jayaswal nor the penetrating insight of Sri Aurobindo.

'Community' and self-development and self-regulation of communal life thus are the distinguishing marks of Indian polity. The State in India evolved through many forms

1. See, for instance, the learned treatise on State & Government in Ancient India of Dr. A. S. Altekar, Director, K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna.

beginning from the small Rigvedic 'kingdom' to vast monarchical empires of the Mauryas and Guptas. In between there were aristocratic republics spreading over the Punjab, Sindh, Eastern U. P. and Northern Bihar. These were the *sanghas* or *ganas* other forms of State were known variously as *rajya*, *swarajya*, *bahurajya*, *dvirajya*, *vairajya*, *maharajya*, *samrajya*. But through them all persisted, and developed according to their own inner laws, the communal bodies. As these bodies were far more stable and enduring than the ever-changing States, the latter, whether republican or monarchical, had little authority over them, apart from guaranteeing that they functioned properly within their own jurisdiction and according to their own constitutions and regulations. The State interfered with them only when they transgressed their own proper functions and procedures. There were very rare exceptions to this rule.

'Community' in ancient India had two forms, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out. The first and basic form was the territorial community, the village or township. With the advancement of communal life, these came to be co-ordinated into larger territorial communities, sometimes embracing a whole Kingdom or republic. But their area never seems to have been very large.

The other form of community was the functional or occupational community, the *varna*. Just as it was natural for man to find communion with neighbours, so it was for him to find it among those who followed the same occupation, even if they were spread over wide, non-contiguous areas. Persons performing the same functions and following the same occupations, shared a common way of life, had common problems and common rights and common responsibilities towards the larger society. It was thus that the social genius

of India developed the functional communities, the four *varnas* and gave them a theoretical as well as a practical form and basis. Each *varna* was self determining and yet integrated with and responsible to the territorial community. The inter-relationship of the individual with the two forms of the community and the inter-relationship between the latter two made up a remarkable self-determining pattern of a complex ethico-socio-economic life.

The *varna* order of society has been so depraved and distorted that there would be few defenders of it now. Yet, the two fundamental truths of it are undeniable. That human beings have different aptitudes and abilities and every individual should be enabled to pursue and develop his natural gifts and inclinations are scientific truths that not only no one thinks of denying, but that every social scientist desires to make the basis of re-organisation of society. The second truth is voiced in one way or another by the schools of functional democracy, guild socialism, pluralistic State, occupational co-operation.

If our present political institutions are to be soundly based, if they are to draw sustenance from the Indian soil and, in turn, if they are to sustain, revive and strengthen the whole fabric of Indian society, they must be related to the social genius of India described above, and their texture must be woven again of organically self-determining, self-developing communal life, in which occupation, professions and functions are integrated with the community.

This is not only a question of constitutional form or political systems. It is a creative question in the widest sense of the term. It is a question of an ancient country finding its lost soul again.

IV

The old village communities have survived in nothing else than their physical existence. They are no longer living communities acting jointly for the solution of individual or communal problems and for the development of their moral and material life. It is not necessary here to go into the story of the destruction of the village communities. It would be enough to note that it was the result of deliberate policy of an alien government that neither understood the character of communal polity nor felt secure in the presence of such strong traditions of self-government and self-help. Nevertheless, the very fact that the villages do exist physically provides us with a ready-made foundation to build upon. But we do not seem to be going about it in the right manner. *Gram panchayats*, no doubt, are being emphasised and established. But this is being done in an alien manner. The principles and methods that are being used will fail to infuse the spirit of community into the empty shells that are our villages today. Nay, they will atomise them yet further. I shall discuss this question more fully in the concluding portion of this paper.

V

A word that figures boldly on the ancient sign-post is *dharma*. Indian polity held that the State was subject to the *dharma*, which it was its duty to uphold and protect.

The concept of *dharma* was of great importance in ancient Indian society and it prescribed and regulated individual and group behaviour in all walks of life.

Dr. Dhawan thus explains that concept : "*Dharma* which corresponds to the German conception of *sittlichkeit*

is a system of culture and discipline rather than a creed. It is neither subjective in the sense of morality imposed by the individual's conscience, nor external like the law enforced by the State. *Dharma* is not a fixed code of mechanical rules, but a living spirit which grows and moves in response to the development of society. The function of *dharma* is to hold together harmoniously the social order and to act as a guide to the individual's conscience so as to train him to realise his potentialities."¹

Dr. Altekar writes : "In the ancient period, India regarded her law (*dharma*) as sacred in origin as did ancient Greece, but it was substantially based on custom. ... *dharma* of ancient India was not consciously made by law-givers or by a legislature; it was generally enforced by social approval or the dread of hell and not by the force of the State. It was not static: it however changed not by the arbitrary will of a king nor the noisy method of legislation but by the slow and prolonged process of change in social customs and practices."²

life as dedicated to duty, *dbritarrata*. The duties of the king were conceived as *Rajadharma*.¹

Sri Aurobindo writes : "As a matter of constitutional theory and ordinary practice all the action of the king was in reality that of the king in his council with the aid of his ministers and all his personal action was only valid as depending on their assent *and in so far as it was a just and faithful discharge of the functions assigned to him by the dharma*. (italics mine).....The obedience owed by the people was due to the Law, the *dharmā*, and to the edicts of the king in council only as an administrative means for the service and maintenance of the *dharmā*.²

It should be borne in mind that the State's subordination to *dharmā* did not make it either theocratic or subordinate to a particular church. Says Dr. Altekar : "The king was no doubt regarded as the protector and enforcer of *dharmā*, but we have shown already how this did not make the State theocratic. His duty was to promote piety and religiousness by extending equal patronage to all sects and religious and to enforce customary laws approved by the social conscience; he discharged this function through offices like the *dharmā-mahamatras* and the *vinayasthitisthapakas*. He was not to be an agent of a particular religion or sect working to promote its interests or seeking to carry out its commands. The crusade of a Hindu state against Buddhism or Jainism is rarely met with in ancient Indian history."³

So strong was the hold of the *dharmā* on Indian society that even when the divinity of the king came to be recognised,

1. A. S. Altekar : op. cit. p. 56.

2. Sri Aurobindo : op. cit. pp. 402-3 .

3. A. S. Altekar : op. cit. p. 55

it did not make the king "infallible or even the sole interpreter of the divine will. Laws, though regarded as divine were really based upon social customs and traditions. By sanctioning their operation, the state did not become an instrument in the hands of the Church or the priests; it rather became the mouthpiece of the social will."¹

To complete the picture it should be mentioned that "though the king was below the *Dharma* and was bound by it, though it was the law (*dharma*) which made the king, the ancient Indian polity provided no constitutional means or checks to call the king to account if he transgressed the law."² There were no doubt punishments prescribed by the law for the king and "in extreme cases extra-constitutional remedies like rebellion or regicide were suggested; but they were usually impracticable. Village councils and town corporations often enjoyed almost complete freedom in their local affairs; the courts whether royal or popular, usually administered the traditional law as embodied in the *jatidharma* (caste rule), *srenidharma* (guild rules) and *janapadadharma* (local customs). But a wilful king could set all these at nought and rule in a tyrannical way, as is shown by the pages of the *Rajatarangini* dealing with the history of medieval Kashmir. From C. 400 A. D. the sovereignty was vested in the king and it was not controlled by constitutional checks of the modern types. Of course it should not be forgotten that most of these checks were evolved in Europe only in the post-Reformation period."³

The absence of constitutional checks, however, was to my mind not such a defect as it appears to be. It is in the

1. A. S. Altekar : op. cit. p. 55

2. A. S. Altekar: op. cit. p. 62

3. A. S. Altekar: op. cit. p. 63

very nature of the moral law and social ethics to rely for their enforcement mainly on the moral sense of the persons concerned and the approval or censure of society at large.

VI

The concept of *dharma* and its role in Indian polity and the wider life of society is another example of that synthetic, organic, communal organisation of Indian society which has been discussed above. Communities, territorial or functional had developed laws and codes of behaviour to regulate the internal life of their communities and groups and their relations with the rest of society. There were in addition codes and laws that were common to and accepted by all of them and that made up the universal social ethics. The ensemble of these social ethics exercised, as we have seen, a powerful influence over the State.

Communal life having been completely destroyed, the roots of *dharma* have no soil from which to draw sustenance. *Dharma* has therefore declined and ceased to exercise any influence not only upon present polity, which is a wholly foreign implantation and has no roots in the Indian soil, but upon all social activities, such as commerce, education, labour, administration, priesthood.. Unless life in India is again organised on the basis of self-determining and mutually co-ordinating and integrating communities, that organic self-regulation of society, which the concept of *dharma* represented, will not be possible. To that extent democracy will remain distantly removed from the life of the people. Vinoba-ji is already speaking, for instance, of a *gram dharma* (the *dharma* of the village). But *gram-dharma* will not arise, as he has stressed, unless the village becomes a community.

Only then will it be possible for the village to adopt as its *dharma* the welfare of all the villagers, so that none goes without food, clothing, a roof over his head, work to do; no child goes without a knowledge of the three R's : none goes without the benefit of a minimum health service.

The ancient concept of *dharma* has to be revived and the appropriate *dharma* for a democracy has to be evolved. This, as of old, will not be brought about by a legislative process nor by the *pandits* of Kashi pronouncing *nyayasthas*. It can be done only in an organic manner : *dharma* must arise from life itself—life that is vital enough, real enough, organic enough to be able to throw up codes and laws for its internal regulation. The experience of recent social engineering may and should be drawn upon, but the main mould of life must be indigenous and consistent with the genius of Indian social organization.

CHAPTER 3 VILLAGE COMMUNITIES OF INDIA

THERE is a fairly voluminous literature on the Village Communities of India, but there seems to be general agreement among the authorities on the main points. What follows is dependent largely upon Dr. Altekar's *State and Government In Ancient India*. All quotes and page references in this section are from this book, unless otherwise specified.

"Since earliest times, the village has been the pivot of administration in India.....There is no doubt that villages were the real centres of social life and important units in the country's economy. They sustained the edifice of national culture, prosperity and administration." (p. 225)

The polity of the village seems to have evolved from simpler, informal, earlier forms to more complex and formal ones by the Gupta period. There is more information available about South India than the North, the inscriptions of the Chola period being the most illuminative. Scholars, however, are agreed that there was not much difference between the North and South in this respect.

In the earlier times the villages functioned through the General Assembly of the whole village (the Vedic *Sabha*), which all house-holders were entitled and invited by beat of drum to attend. Later when executive functions multiplied and became more complex, elected village councils, variously known in the Gupta and post-Gupta period as *panchamandalis* (Central India), *gramjanapadas* (Bihar), *pan-*

chakula (Rajputana), *alunganam* (Tamil Nad) came into existence. It is these bodies that later became generally known as village *panchayats*. In large and better organised villages, in South India, the administration was run through elected sub-committees.

There is a rather detailed record of the working of one such village, Uttaramerur, which is still flourishing in Chingleput district, with only a slightly changed name Uttaramulur. Even at the cost of some space I should like to give a brief description of the administration of this village because it gives us a vivid impression of the vitality and vigour of the village communities of old.

"The government of this village was carried on by five sub-committees of the *sabha*. All members worked in the honorary capacity and held office for one year. They could, however, be removed earlier, if found guilty of misconduct. It was felt that all experienced and qualified residents of the village should get an opportunity to serve on the various sub-committees; one of the rules, therefore, provided that a member.....who had served once on a sub-committee was not to be re-appointed to it during the next three years. Persons whose character was loose, or who had been found guilty of misappropriation of public funds, were debarred from membership as also their near relatives. The bar against the latter was obviously intended for increasing the volume of public opinion against those who were guilty of defalcation of public funds. Members were to be neither too young nor too old; their age was to be above 35 but below 70. These negative qualifications, however, were not sufficient. Candidates were required to own a house and at least $\frac{1}{2}$ *veli* (about two acres) of tax-paying land. It

was felt that those who deal with public funds should be persons above need. But the property qualifications were of halved in the case of those who were good scholars either the Vedic learning, or of Smritis, or of *bhasyas* (philosophy). It was but natural that an *agrabara* community (i.e., a Brahman village) should be anxious that its representatives on the different village committees should be, as far as possible, well-to-do scholars, of good character and known rectitude. It is worth nothing that no government officers were included in these committees." (p. 231-32)

Of the five sub-committees, the first was "in charge of the village gardens and orchards; the second supervised the village tank and the distribution of its water; the third discharged the important function of settling disputes; the fourth was known as the gold committee and its function was to assay gold for all people impartially.....There was no standard state coinage and so gold that was offered for taxes or prices had to be certified about its fineness. A special procedure was laid down for the selection of the members of this sub-committee. The fifth sub-committee was known as *panchvara* committee, but its functions are not clear." (p. 233-34)

"In addition to these five sub-committees, there was a general committee of supervision known as Annual Committee (*samvatsara-variyam*). Only experienced elders, who had previously served on other sub-committees, were eligible for the membership of this body." (p. 234) The village Uttaramerur seems to have had a highly developed, democratic system of self-government. But this village was no exception—only its records are better preserved.

Other village records show that there were other kinds of committees too, such as land survey committee, temple

committee, etc. "Some *agrabara* villages had their own colleges; they probably had an education committee." (p. 234)

Administration through sub-committees was not the general pattern of village government: it was the village council that usually administered the village.

A few words about the functioning of the village councils. They seem to have had varied and wide functions that included all that was within the power of the community. Collection of Land revenue was one of their important functions. It was the councils that negotiated with government for concessions in the usual demand in the case of famines or other similar calamities; and when the amount was once settled it was the councils that made the collections, even going to the length of auctioning the land of the farmer who happened to be in long arrears. The ownership of the village waste lands was vested in the councils. Settlement of disputes was one of the most important functions of these bodies. In the first instance, family elders or the guild to which the disputants belonged tried to settle the disputes; but if they failed, the village council decided the dispute. Serious crimes were excluded from the jurisdiction of the councils, but in civil matters there was no limitation.

Dr. Altekar rejects the theory of some early writers that the village councils owed their judicial powers to the prevailing political instability. He says that the evidence of the *Smritis*, inscriptions and Maratha records completely disprove this view. The *Smritis* observe that the decisions of the village councils must be enforced by the State. Documents of the Maratha period show that kings like Shivaji, Rajaram and Sahu would invariably return any suit brought

directly to them to the village *panchayat*. Dr. Altekar gives an interesting instance concerning King Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur: "A suit involving the right to the post of the headman of the village of Masur was decided against one Bapaji Musalman by the Masur Panchayat, and the decision was confirmed by the Tehsil or Taluka Panchayat of Karad. Bapaji Musalman then appealed direct to the King Ibrahim Adil Shah, complaining that he had not received proper justice owing to communal prejudice. The emperor refused to entertain the suit in his own court, but ordered its retrial by the Hindu Panchayat of the famous holy place of Paithan. When this Panchayat also refused to reverse the lower decisions, Ibrahim Adil Shah declined to take any further action." (p.237-38)

Regarding more ancient times, Dr. Altekar remarks: "We may well conclude that the village courts, called *Puga* by *Yajnavalkya*, were functioning during the first millenium of the Christian era in the same way as in later centuries." (p. 238)

Further about the functions of the village executives, "South Indian inscriptions show that the village councils used to transact business as bankers as well." (p. 238)

Chola records show that in case of famines the councils raised public loans by mortgaging the common lands.

Village councils used to organise works of public utility, such as tanks, canals, roads, wells, reclamation of waste lands and forests.

The councils are found to be engaged in the promotion of cultural, and intellectual activities by endowments for studies and by establishing schools and colleges.

Records show of villages maintaining their own local militia for self-protection.

Gandhiji has said somewhere that the villages should function according to constitutions made by themselves. This is exactly how the Indian villages functioned in the past.

To quote Dr. Altekar: "Most of the dynasties in ancient India used to flourish for about two centuries. The village communities and councils were, on the other hand, of hoary antiquity and derived their powers from immemorial custom and not from any charter or delegation from the Central Government." (p. 242). And again: "A perusal of the evidence, however, clearly suggests that usually the village Primary Assemblies themselves determined the constitution of their committees and not the Central Government. The same probably was the case in northern India as well... There was hardly any scope for the Central Government to dictate any constitution." (p. 243).

Speaking particularly of South India Dr. Altekar says again: "Each *sabha* was usually the architect of its own constitution. The earliest known constitution, that of the *mahasabha* of Manalainallur, was framed by the body itself at a special meeting of villagers convened by a beat of drums. When amendments became necessary in the constitution, they also were usually considered and passed by the *sabha* itself." (p. 233).

How were the village council and other committees elected or selected? There was no election in the current sense of the word. It seems the village communities instinctively avoided a procedure that might become divisive. The executive bodies and their sub-committees were *selected* by general approval or consensus of the community gathered in the general assembly of the village. Some times they were selected by drawing lots according to a settled procedure.

Dr. Altekar writes: "It does not seem that election of the modern type giving rise to party jealousies and rivalries was prevailing anywhere. Persons were periodically elevated to the council by the consensus of public opinion as expressed in a general meeting of all the respectable householders of the village. Caste consideration did not sway in the selection of the council members. Many non-Brahmans worked on it in the Gupta age; on the judgments of many village Panchayats in the Maratha period appear the signatures of not only non-Brahmanas but also of untouchables." (p. 235) Again: "In the Agrahara villages of Tamil country the executive committees were usually constituted by drawing lots; in other places probably names were previously discussed informally by the leading residents, and when it was felt that they were generally acceptable, they were formally proposed in the Primary Assemblies and accepted by them. It is very unlikely that there was any regular voting as in modern times." (p. 241).

Here is a description of the procedure of selection by lots: "At Uttaramerur members of the different sub-committees were selected by drawing lots. Several nominations were made for each of the thirty wards of the village, the name of each nominee being put on a separate ticket. All the tickets for each ward were put in a pot and a young child, who was quite innocent of what it was called upon to do, was asked to pick up one ticket. That person was declared elected for each ward whose name was on the ticket so taken out. There was no room for canvassing for party politics." (p. 233).

I should like to conclude this section with a final summing up by Dr. Altekar: "It will be thus seen that the Central Government exercised only a general supervision

and control over the Village Assemblies and their Councils. It left the initiative to the Village Councils which enjoyed large powers. They made effective arrangements for the defence of the community, collected the taxes of the Central Government and levied their own, settled village disputes, organised works of public utility and recreation; functioned as trustees and bankers, raised public loans to mitigate the miseries famines, organised schools, colleges and poor houses and arranged for their funds, and supervised the manifold religious and cultural activities of the temples. *There can be no doubt that they exercised greater powers than those that are at present enjoyed by the local bodies in most countries, both of the east and of the west.* They played an important and creditable part in defending the interests of the villagers and in promoting their material, moral and intellectual progress.”(p.243-44) (italics mine).

I do not apologise for devoting so much space to the village communities, because I consider them to be pivotal not only for the regeneration of Indian polity but for the regeneration of Indian society as a whole. Unfortunately in modern educated circles of India there is little understanding or appreciation of the role of the village in Indian history and its potential role in the future. Only the other day in one of the leading dailies a well-known columnist, in what appeared to me to be an unfair criticism of the Community Development Administration, made the rash remark that “our villages in any case have never known ‘a sense of identity of interests’ and ‘a feeling of mutual obligation!’” (“Observer” in the Times of India, July 31, 1959).

Lest some one should say that Dr. Altekar is a romanticist who has tried to idealise the past, I should like to quote a few foreign authorities. Other eminent Indian scholars,

of course, like Professors Radhakamal and Radhakumud Mukherji or Dr. Beni Prasad might also be classed with Dr. Altekar as romanticists. Shri Shrinan Narayan in his Gandhian Constitution quotes a few European authorities and I am borrowing the quotations from him. (pp. 46-47).

Sir Charles Trevellyn remarks. "(One foreign conqueror after another has swept over India, but the Village Municipalities have stuck to the soil like their own Kusha grass.)"

Sir George Birdwood has been quoted as saying, "India has undergone more religious and political revolutions than any other country in the world. But the Village Communities remain in full municipal vigour all over the peninsula. Scythian, Greek, Saracen, Afghan, Mongol, and Maratha have come down from its mountains, and Portugese, Dutch, English, French, and Dane up out of its seas, and set up their successive dominations in the land; but the religious trades-union villages have remained as little affected by their coming and going as a rock by the rising and falling of the tide." Finally there are the oft-quoted words of Sir Charles Metcalfe, the then Acting Governor-General, in his famous minute of 1830: "The village communities, are little republics, having nearly everything they can want, within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts.. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds. revolution;..... but the village community remains the same..... This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the peoples of India, through all the revolutions and changes.

which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence. I wish, therefore, that the village constitutions may never be disturbed and I dread everything that has a tendency to break them up."

In spite of Metcalfe's dread, imperial policy went ahead systematically to destroy these centres of independence and self-reliance. For the first time India had a conqueror who did what none had done before. The destruction of the little village republics was the greatest injury that British imperialism inflicted upon this ancient country. If the Indian villages, where 80% of her people still reside, had retained the old "municipal vigour", community development, national reconstruction, would have become a child's play. It is only 129 years since 1830, and yet even the memory of that glorious past has been rubbed off the minds, not only of the illiterate villagers but even of the educated elite. Such is one of the results of our wonderful system of education!

Some have wondered why Gandhiji, in this age of urbanization, was so keen about the village and never tired of talking about the "self-sufficient, self-governing village republics." Gandhiji was keen because he knew what the villages were at one time, and he wanted to make the living, direct democracy of the village the basis of the Indian democracy of his vision. Further, he looked at every thing from the point of view of non-violence, and the self-governing, self-reliant, cooperative, communal life of the village seemed to provide him with the base on which to build. Gandhiji had his own view of economy and polity in which exploitation and government from a distant centre were reduced to a minimum. The village seemed to Gandhiji to be the

unit with which such an economy and polity could be built. To be sure Gandhiji did not think that the villages as they are today, or even as they were before, could become the cells of the social organism of his conception. He has said, "The nearest approach to civilization based upon non-violence is the erstwhile village republic of India. I admit non-violence of my definition and conception. *But the germ was there.*"¹ (*italics mine*).

1. G. Dhawan, op. cit. pp. 288-89

CHAPTER 4 THE SOCIAL NATURE OF MAN AND THE COMMUNITY

I

*M*an is a social animal and is endowed with social nature. He is born in society, lives and dies in society. His nature makes him crave for "society", that is to say, for community with other men. Every individual man is unique and has a distinct individuality, but his uniqueness and individuality have meaning and purpose only when he is a member of society. No man can live alone, or if he does, can have any human significance. He is then a freak of nature or an accident of life, he is beyond the pale of human society, he is not man. He is "wolf-man", or something of that sort, as his rare historical specimens have some times been called.

Further, the relation of the individual to society is not like that of the grain of sand to the sand dune. The relationship is rather like that of the living cell to the living organism. Man always lives in organic relationship with other men. It is the totality of these living relationships that constitutes society. Society is not a mere sum of separate individuals. Not even the crowd is an inorganic sum of human grains.

All this is nothing new, of course. But what is remarkable is that while in one compartment of knowledge, let us say, sociology, this is considered to be axiomatic, in another compartment, let us say, of political science or

economics, this elementary yet fundamental truth is entirely over-looked. The reason, of course, is that neither political nor economic science, inspite of the claim of both to be science, is founded upon a science of society. Political and economic activities are much more ancient than the science of society. Political and economic institutions and activities grew up and developed any how; and the "science" part of the sciences of politics and economics consists only in the *scientific* study of these institutions and processes—their origin and growth, their 'laws' of operation and change, prediction about their future.

To return to the social nature of man. The first creation of the social nature of man was the family. The family is the primary, or as Madariaga says, the mother cell of human society. It is in the family that man arrives first, and it is there that he spends his childhood and adolescence. Without the family and its care and upbringing the individual cannot survive, let alone become a human person. Even as an adult the family is with him and he lives and labours to assure its security and happiness; he fights to protect it and is ready to die to defend its honour. It is in the family that man learns the values of co-operation, mutual adjustment, and self-sacrifice. It is there that his character is mainly formed and where he acquires the culture of the larger society of which his family is a unit. As Madariaga has so meaningfully put it: "The school instructs but the family educates!"¹

Thus the human individual is not an individual at all, but, to use Madariaga's phrase, an individual -in-the-family, like the king-in-council. It follows from all this that any

1. Salvador de. Madariaga, op. cit. p. 45.

wise order of society must be such that in it the family not only remains in tact but also finds full opportunities for its true functioning. Nay, much more than this: any good and wise society must learn and incorporate in its life the values and attitudes that govern the family.

Next to the family the social environment that is most natural to man is the local community—the village or municipality, which Madariaga aptly describes as a “federation of families”. A single family is too small a social unit to live by itself, so a number of families come together and co-operate to make it possible for each to live and thrive. The local, or primary, or face-to-face community, rural or urban, was a world-wide phenomenon. This was only natural because it was in answer to the social nature of man. It should be of interest to us to be reminded that though it was a universal phenomenon, the local community had its highest development and longest career in India.

The social nature of man was unable to create higher or more extended forms of social organisation consistent with its needs and demands. In some areas of the world, such as in India, unions of the local communities had been formed for mutual benefit, but they were rather rudimentary. Other aspects of human nature and other circumstances checked that development.¹ But at least the local communities,

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1. It may be asked if the social manifestations of the nature of man could be interfered with and set at naught by man himself: should not the social nature of man manifest itself in unalterable social institutions and processes? There precisely we have the difference between man and the other animals. The latter have their instincts which determine their behaviour patterns. But man is endowed with mind, will and consciousness that make an unlimited variety of behaviour possible, including behaviour that is contrary to his nature.

where man had some "society", existed for hundreds and even thousands of years. This state of affairs was, however, radically altered and all further development and enlargement of the human community blocked by a significant event in human affairs: the advent of machine-industry. It was machine-industry that uprooted man from his local and functional community (guilds) and herded him like sheep in monstrous cities, where he became like drift-wood on the ocean's breast. An eminent British scholar has described this process thus: "Britain was the pioneer explorer of the uncharted maze of machine-industry, with a population uprooting itself from the soil and crowding into slums that in the course gave birth to vast amounts of unearned increment to be used as industrial capital. The population became a *fortuitous concourse of atoms* and even thinkers often forget that *a crowd is not society* and that provision for *social life* is a primary need of a *social* being. It is true that the *feeling for society*, being a basic feature, found alternative expressions in philanthropic, sporting, frivolous and even disreputable associations, but the relation of all these to *local social life as a whole* was too limited."¹ (italics mine).

It was the same process that led to the "fortuitous concourse of atoms" that created the atomistic or statistical democracy of the present-day western world. Modern western democracy is based on a negation of the social nature of man and the true nature of human society. This democracy conceives of society as an inorganic mass of separate grains of individuals: the conception is that of an

The animal cannot contradict his nature, man can and does. This opens unlimited possibilities of human evolution.

1. H. J. Fleure, in Preface to Peter Manniche's *Living Democracy* in Denmark, p. 5

II

The problem of devising the right kind of polity is obviously a part of the larger problem of social reconstruction. While it is true that in the past greed and other false values of life distorted or thwarted the working of man's social nature it is necessary now when man is beginning consciously to re-order his life to create economic, political and other institutions that are consistent with that nature. Modern industrialism and the *spirit of economism* that it has created, a spirit which weighs every human value on the scales of

profit and loss and so-called economic progress, integrated human society and made man an alien to fellow men. Not only has the community been integrated, even the family is languishing in the West. The mother, the woman, who was the centre and soul of the family is losing her woman-hood. As Madariag says, "the home is losing its character as a centre of well-being, of joyment, of taste, of gathering experience in common life. The creation of typical groups united by 'family spirit'—words so well express it. Similarly, woman is losing her femininity. Now she is a bus conductress or a station, wearing masculine attire without grace, with a man's cap balanced precariously on her tousled hair. A failure as a man, when she has been a success as a woman, she finds nothing but weariness and fatigue in living a knock-about life which she had dreamed of a life of freedom."

The problem of present day civilization is social isolation. Man is alone and bored, he is "organized" and ordered about and manipulated by forces beyond his control—irrespective of whether it is a "democracy" or dictatorship. The problem is to put man in contact with man, so that they may live together in meaningful, understandable, controllable relationships. In short, it is to re-create the human community.

Fortunately for us in India, the process of disintegration of society has not gone very far, and we have still a few hundred thousand villages, where 80% of our population live, at least the physical basis on which to found a new community. In another chapter will be found a brief description of the village communities of old. It is a record of thousands of years of communal life and

tration, rich in experience and full of lessons for us at the present time.

III

Let me now turn to the community. Territorial contiguity of a number of families, while it is the starting point and a most important condition, does not in itself make a community. The present-day Indian villages, for instance, are not proper communities. They were so at one time, but now are mere territorial settlements; life in them being individualistic rather than communal; mineral rather than organic. *In the true community there is communion i.e., sharing participation, fellowship, as the dictionary puts it; there is identity of interest; a feeling of unity in the midst of diversity; a sense of freedom within the frame-work of accepted social responsibilities; differentiation of functions converging to the single goal of the good of the community and its members. Caste, class, race, religion, politics—all these divide men into different, often conflicting groups. The community brings them together, unites them and harmonises their interests. In the community agriculture, industry, capital, labour, skill, intelligence are not at logger-heads with one another, but are synthesised in the service of the community. Production and consumption are not two contra-posed sides of an economic bargain manipulated by distant agencies, but an integrated process serving a single and direct purpose. The community is built up of personal relationships, and choice and free will have their play within the limits of self-imposed discipline and common culture. In the community there is understanding participation by the members in all communal affairs. The community is a cooperative society, but the difference between it and the ordinary co-operative "society"*

is that cooperation in the community embraces the whole of life, rather than only its economic sector, and all the members of the community rather than only those who produce shares. Every one in the community has a share in its fortunes and mis-fortunes. In its internal order the community is self-regulating and self-determining. Dissension is poison for the community, so the endeavour must be to seek the highest common denominator. As Mr. Adriano Olivetti has so well put it, the motto of the community is the same that animated the Council of Trent: "In essential things, unity; in doubt, freedom; in all things, tolerance."

It is interesting to recall here that in the Indian village communities there were no elections to executive office on the present majority-minority pattern, which is a divisive and disruptive process. Instead there was selection by general consensus of opinion, or sometimes, by drawing lots.

I do not mean to say by all this that such a community as described above ever existed before, or that it would automatically come about if only people began to dwell in small territorial areas. Had it been so, all the Indian villages would have become ideal communities. What I do, however, wish to say, and say it with all the emphasis at my command, is that such community must be the ideal of future social reconstruction. Only then will the social nature of man and the great humanist ideals of modern civilization find fulfilment. Only then too there will be true democracy.

For the heavily industrialised and urbanised countries of the West, this might be a difficult task—though many thinking Western minds are already giving their serious

IV

Before proceeding to consider the community further it may be advisable to deal briefly with the question of science and its impact on social organisation. It may be urged that small local communities might have fitted at one time into the rural pattern of life, but in this age of industrialism they have hardly any place except as odd specimens of a past civilisation. Industrialisation and urbanisation, it may be said, necessarily go together.

I completely reject this view. The choice is not between urbanisation and rural life. The dichotomy between urban and rural is false and unscientific. Both industry and agriculture are essential for human life and its development. The question of industry should be looked upon from the point of view of the whole man: it should never be forgotten that industry is for man and not man for industry. Some people talk of science and technology as if they were like forces of nature, like an earthquake, let us say, about which

1. Pyarelal, *op. cit.* p. 588.

nothing can be done except adjusting ourselves to it. Science, industry are all products of the human mind and they should be bent to human purpose. Indeed this is what has already happened: only the human purpose has not been an elevated and worthy one. Science, and its offspring, technology have been chiefly put to the service of private profit and power: the first represented by the capitalist system, the second by the modern centralised state, whether democratic or totalitarian.

It is common to call science neutral and amoral and to put the blame on man. The blame, of course, is there, but it is meaningless to call science neutral or amoral. Science, after all, is a product of purposive human endeavour; as such, it cannot be said to be morally neutral. If science does not conduce to human happiness and promote human values of life, it is not science but pseudo-science. The "science" that has led to the disruption of human society, to the alienation of man from his fellow human beings, to the creation of economic and political Leviathans and to man's increasing subordination to them, to man's automatization, must be rejected as false science and a new science and technology must be discovered to serve a better way of life. Commercialisation of science has to be replaced with humanisation of science; instead of science being exploited for power and profit, it has to be used for peace and happiness.

If man decided that instead of being herded together in large cities it was better to live in small communities, instead of being automatons it was better to be conscious human beings, instead of being a grain in the sand-heap it was better to be member of a community, it should not be difficult for scientists to evolve the appropriate technology.

"Suppose", observes Aldous Huxley, "it becomes the acknowledged purpose of inventors and engineers to use applied science to provide the common folk with the means of 'doing profitable and intrinsically significant work, of helping men and women to achieve independence from bosses, so that they may become their own employers, or members of a self-governing, cooperative group working for subsistence and a local market'. Backed by appropriate legislation, 'this differently oriented technological progress' would result in a 'progressive decentralisation of population, of accessibility of land, of ownership of the means of production, of political and economic power'. In addition there would be 'the social advantages of a more humanly satisfying life for more people, a greater measure of genuine self-governing democracy and a blessed freedom from the silly or pernicious adult education provided by the mass producers of consumer goods through the medium of advertisements'. Science too would gain thereby. Scientific progress is hindered when science is commercialised.¹

Olivetti goes so far as to say that "Technical and cultural progress leads to decentralisation toward the federation of small cities where life is lived intensely and where there is harmony, peace, green grass and trees, silence, as far removed from the chaos of our present overcrowded cities as from the isolation and discouragement of man by himself."²

Thus the society we are visualising here will be *neither* "urban" *nor* "rural" it will be, if a name has to be given to it, *communitarian*. In other words, it will truly be *scientific*. Development of science has made it possible for the dis-

1. Pyarchid, op. cit. p. 5-7.

2. Adriano Olivetti, 'Community On The March', p. 14.

inction between urban and rural to be abolished. The communities of the future will have a balance of agriculture and industry; they will be agro-industrial; they will make full use of science and technology so as to serve the ends of their life and no more. Owing to geographic and historical conditions agriculture may predominate in one and industry in another, but a balance between them will be the ideal of all. The present monstrosities, the big cities, will have to be decentralised as far as possible to relieve congestion and create healthy conditions of life; and for the rest, they will have to be so re-organised as to be made federations of smaller size communities. To the extent this is not possible, the big cities will have to be endured, care being taken so that they do not become bigger, and no new big cities come up.

The question may be asked *how large should be the local or primary community*. There cannot be a cut-and-dried answer; there is *no mechanical measure*. The primary communities are organic growths and, depending upon many factors, their size varies. Let it be said that they should not be so small that a balanced development of communal life and culture becomes difficult, nor so large that life in them becomes impersonalised. The "revenue village" in India has a well understood definition, and even though it usually consists of a number of hamlets, all the inhabitants of them do feel a sense of belonging to one another. So, *in India the revenue village may be taken as the primary community*. In States where the revenue village may be too large and an artificial unit, a new demarcation may have to be made.

V

We have so far discussed the local or primary community and shown how it is a creation of man's social nature and

the unit with which the structure of society has to be built. Let us now consider how this can be done. Should society be just a sum, a totality, of the primary units? It should be obvious that such a society would be as arithmetic and mineral, or nearly so, as the one, like the present Western society, that is made up of the sum of individuals. Just as in the primary community a number of families come together and cooperate to build a common life, so in order that there may be society, the primary communities must come together and cooperate with other primary communities so as to tackle common problems and promote common aims. Such cooperation and coordination of activities will obviously be impossible between distant and very large numbers of primary communities: *mutual intercourse is possible only between neighbouring communities.* Therefore, the next step in building up of an integrated society is for a number of neighbouring primary communities to come together and cooperate amongst themselves to build, let us say, a regional community. Each single primary community will do all that may be possible with its internal resources. But there will be many things that will be beyond the resources and competence of the primary community. For instance, each primary community might be able to provide for a primary school, primary health services, small irrigation works, like wells and village tanks, village industries. But a number of primary communities must cooperate together in order to provide for a higher school, an in-door hospital, a power station and servicing centre, larger industries, larger irrigation works, etc. Thus the regional community comes into existence by an organic process of growth. The circle of community is widened. It will be seen for this that the regional community is not a mere sum of the smaller communities

constituting them. *It is an integral community in itself.* In other words, at the regional level there is an integration of institutions and activities of the primary communities: the village panchayats are integrated into the regional panchayat; the village cooperatives in the regional cooperative union; the primary schools in the regional higher school, the village youths and cultural associations in the regional one, the village plans in the regional plan etc. Just as in its internal administration the primary community is autonomous, so in the spheres in which the primary communities have delegated their powers to the regional community, the latter is autonomous. (The need to delegate powers arises from the fact that the primary communities are unable by themselves to do everything that needs to be done). *The regional community, however, is not a superior or higher body that can control, or interfere with, the internal administration of the primary communities. Each in its sphere is equally sovereign.*

The regional community in its turn will do all that is within its competence. But, again, there will be many things which will be beyond its competence, such as running a techno-agricultural college, a major irrigation project, production of electricity, manufacture of machines, etc. In order that these tasks be tackled a number of regional communities will have to come together to form a still larger community—the district community, let us say. The district community too will be an integral community and its relationship with the regional communities be of a similar pattern to that of the latter with the primary communities.

In this manner the district communities in their turn would federate together to form the provincial¹ community.

1. The term 'State' as at present used has no relevance to the type of

1. The first step in the process of the investigation is to identify the problem. This is done by the investigator who is responsible for the investigation. The investigator will then gather information about the problem and the people involved. This information will be used to determine the cause of the problem and to develop a plan to solve it.

It is a common fallacy to think that the State will be able to take its place, that it will be placed from the inner circle of the international community and organize it, thereby making it the center of the entire community; so that, in the end, the circle of the National Communities it has created will be able to spread to, such as defense, foreign relations, economy, interior external coordination and legislation.

The best society should be situated, in the second place, next to a "socialist" society in order the most receptive for the "people's" work, and no longer an amorphous mass of human beings but organized in self-governing communities—to govern themselves. The soundest, rational,..... but it cannot be otherwise, because this kind of society is, among other things, *deliberately* organized for self-government.

The *co-operative* polity that has been described above can alone guarantee the *participating* democracy which is our ideal and which should be the ideal of all democrats. It will only be in such a society that the individual will be able to save himself from the fate of "robotism" to which modern civilization has condemned him and find freedom and self-significance as a member of the community. As Lord Northbourne has observed, "If we are to have any kind of human rule to preserve individual freedom,

social organisation herein visualised. According to our concept each village community is a 'city state' and each concentric circle of community is a 'state' within its area.

not to lose it, it can only be based on the existence of small, manageable, sound primary units, in themselves *coherent and self-contained*, which can be *built up* into large units, in their turn *coherent and self-contained*.”¹ (italics mine)

VI

Before leaving this discussion of the structure of society, there is one more question of importance that I should like to deal with briefly. The question is, out of the different circles of community, from the smallest to the largest, is there one that can be said to be more important than the others, a sort of key community, from the point of view of development of man and the communal life of the people? I believe there should be one, and to determine it is an important task of social engineering. In ancient and medieval India, the village community was the key community, even when unions of village communities existed. Of course, it has to be remembered that the communal life principle was never developed to its logical limits. Indeed it could not have been, due to lack of concentration and constant political upheavals. But to the extent to which it had been developed, the primary community itself, i.e., the village community, was the key unit of society. Under present conditions, the revenue village, which we have taken as the primary community, is too small for undertaking development by itself. At the same time, the district community would be too large for this purpose.

Adriano Olivetti has, in this connection, put forward the concept of an *optimum* community. He says, “Both history and reason lead us to the solution, which is the

1. Pyarelal, op. cit., p. 581.

optimum community, neither too big nor too small: *a community that can be measured on the human scale.*"¹ (italics mine). He says again, "Too small a community cannot allow an adequate development of man of the community itself. At the opposite extreme, the great concentrated and monopolistic metropolises *atomize and depersonalise man*. We find the optimum between the two."² (italics mine). According to Olivetti "the real problem of modern democracy is to define an optimum sphere of local authority, which can reconcile the preservation of freedom with the demands of functionality that have been imposed on society by modern technology."³

A question akin to the one we are considering was dealt with by the Study Team for Community Development and National Extension Service, headed by Shri Balvantray Mehta. The Team, among other things, considered "the need for creating within the district a well organised democratic structure of administration in which the village panchayats will be organically linked with popular organisations at a higher level."⁴ The Report of the Team says further, "Democracy has to function through certain executive machinery, but the democratic government operating over large areas through its executive machinery cannot adequately appreciate local needs and circumstances. It is, therefore, necessary that there should be a devolution of power and a decentralisation of machinery and that such power be exercised and such machinery controlled by popular representatives of the local area."⁵

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1. A. Olivetti, *Community Ideals*, pp. 6-7.
 2. A. Olivetti, *Community On The March*, p. 14
 3. *Ibid*, p. 8
 4. Report, p. 5
 5. Report, p. 7

In view of these considerations the Team held that the district boards were, among other things, too large for this purpose. Similarly, other existing administrative units were rejected. The Team finally selected the community development block area as the appropriate unit. "The block.....offers an area large enough for functions which the village panchayat cannot perform and yet small enough to, attract interest and service of the residents."¹ Again, "we are of the view that the most efficient and useful arrangement in this regard is to have an elected self-governing institution whose jurisdiction would be co-extensive with a development block."² The Team decided tentatively to call this institution the *panchayat samiti* which "should be constituted by indirect elections from the village panchayats."³

The Balvantray Mehta Team did not have before it a full picture of the communitarian society, nor was it concerned with the task of drawing the outlines of such a society. Nevertheless, upto a point there is much in common between the Team's approach and the one made here. *I feel* therefore, that *the community comprised within the panchayat samiti should be regarded as the optimum community as conceived above. This optimum community will be co-extensive with the regional community mentioned earlier, as interposed between the primary and district communities.*

VII

Those who are acquainted with Gandhiji's thought will find in the picture of society presented here much that is

1. Ibid, p. 9

2. Ibid, p. 9

3. Ibid, p. 10

familiar. Who will not be able to recall the following well-known and oft-quoted passage:

“In this structure, composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual, always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.”

CHAPTER 5 PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

THERE is a formidable volume of literature on parliamentary democracy—including in the term systems akin to it, such as the American presidential democracy. There is also a vast literature on the party system which appears in the wake of this type of democracy.

I believe, it would be fair to say that even the most ardent defenders of parliamentary democracy agree that it has serious defects. But they console themselves with the thought (a) that there is no better alternative; (b) that, within limits, it is possible to amend and improve it. No one will deny that the system is capable of much improvement and it is undergoing change all the time, though not always for the better. But no matter how much improved, its fundamental defects will yet remain because they are the very premises on which its entire structure has been raised.

(1) The *fundamental defect*, from which other serious defects issue, is that this form of democracy is *based on the vote of the individual*. We have already examined this situation and found that it is the atomization of society that is responsible for this kind of political system. But that does not alter the fact that the system is based on a false premise—the State cannot be an arithmetic sum of individuals. The people, the nation, the community can ever be equated with the sum of individual voters.

M. Madariaga says, "The present system is not de-

moctatic at all. It does not represent the *demos*, that is to say the population taken as a political entity, but the *laos*, the human particles of the mass accumulated without organization or collective consciousness. The present system is therefore *laocratic* rather than democratic."¹ Walter Lippman writes, "It is often assumed, but without warrant, that the opinions of the people as voters can be treated as the expression of the interests of *The People* as an historic community. The crucial problem of modern democracy arises from the fact that this assumption is false."² Elaborating he says further, "It sounds incongruous to modern ears that the Pope should represent the people. But is it so congruous that the people should be represented by a count of the votes of some persons? The conundrum springs from the fact that while *The People* as a corporate body are the true owners of the sovereign power, *The People* as an aggregate of voters, have diverse, conflicting self-centered interests and opinions. A plurality of them cannot be counted upon to represent the corporate nation."³ He goes on to add that, "The distinction upon which I am dwelling does not, as one might suppose, cease to matter when the voters become enormously many.....Our experience with mass elections in the twentieth century compels us, I think, to the contrary conclusion: that public opinion becomes less realistic as the mass to whom information must be conveyed, and argument must be addressed, grows larger and more heterogeneous."⁴ After this it should not be surprising to hear M. Madariaga say, "If there is one conclusion we can draw without fear

1. Salvador de Madariaga, op. cit. pp. 81-82

2. Walter Lippman, *The Public Philosophy*, Mentor, 1956, p. 32.

3. Walter Lippman, *The Public Philosophy*, Mentor, 1956, p. 32.

4. Walter Lippman, *The Public Philosophy*, Mentor 1956, p. 37.

of being mistaken it is that direct universal suffrage for electing national parliaments is not a truly democratic instrument. It belongs rather to the arsenal from which totalitarian arms issue."

(2) The partisans of parliamentary democracy claim that under it the government is at least representative of the majority of the voters, if not of the people. First of all, this is not true. More often than it is commonly believed governments elected under universal adult suffrage are minority governments, in the sense that they represent a minority of the voters. Wherever there are more than two parties, this happens quite often, but even under two party systems, it is not a rare phenomenon. At the last General Election in this country, for instance, minority governments were established in a majority of the States, i.e., in seven out of the thirteen States, excluding Union Territories. In this way the "minority" States were: Bihar (Congress : 44.47%); Bombay (Congress: 48.66%); Kerala (Communist : 37.48%); Madras (Congress: 46.52%); Orissa (Congress : 40.01%); Uttar Pradesh (Congress: 46.29%); West Bengal (Congress : 49.20%)¹.

It will not do to brush aside, as it has been done in this country, such serious anomalies and glaring defects in the parliamentary democratic system by the smug remark that such things are inevitable under a multi-party system. If such things are inevitable and if we are serious about democracy we must seriously set about to find a better type of democracy. The alternatives, as M. Madariaga has pointed out, of plural constituencies, proportional representation, alternative vote cannot, even if there was general agreement about them, which there is not, take us far.

1. The figures are from the Report of the Election Commission.

(3) The claim that parliamentary democratic governments at least represent a majority of the voters breaks down in a still more serious manner. Experience has shown—and many distinguished political thinkers have pointed it out, as in the passage of Mr. Lippman quoted above—that present-day mass elections manipulated by powerful, centrally controlled parties, with the aid of high finance and diabolically clever methods and super media of communication represent far less the electorate than the forces and interests behind the parties and the propaganda machines. It is not only in the totalitarian countries that the ‘rape of the masses’ happens. The basic difference is that in a democracy there is a competition between the violators while there is no competition in totalitarianism.

(4) Here we are face to face with another serious defect of parliamentary democracy—demagoguery. The need to ‘catch’ votes creates an unlimited opportunity for indulging in half-truths, even outright lies some-times; for exciting the passions, more often than not, the base passions; for arousing false hopes by making dishonest, but pleasing promises. Hardly any issue of public policy is presented to the people in its true light; everything gets distorted by partisan demagoguery. The consequence of all this is that the real interests of the nation are sacrificed, more often than not, at the altar of demagoguery. “Elections demand arithmetical operations, more or less complicated according to the electoral system in force, to count the particles-of-the-mass. It inevitably follows that candidates are forced to lower the level of the electoral battle in order to gain in surface what they lose in height in the social pyramid. On that account, the parliamentary system tends inevitably to oversimplify the problems of collective life, which are always

highly complex. It also tends to involve prejudice, passion and emotions which deform them; and to indulge in eloquent outbidding which does not hesitate to sacrifice the good of the country, and even the real and long-term interests of the electors, to their own immediate and apparent interests.”¹

Walter Lippman has drawn a very interesting distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ policies. The soft ones are those that reflect people’s desires, the hard ones that reflect what is needed to be done to satisfy the desire. “Faced with these choices,” he says, “between the hard and the soft, the normal propensity of democratic governments is to please the largest number of votes.....That is why governments are unable to cope with reality when elected assemblies and mass opinions become decisive in the State, when there are no statesmen to resist the inclination of the voters and there are only politicians to excite and exploit them.”²

In the short period of twelve years we have had sufficient experience of demagoguery and the harm it has done to the national interest.

(5) Perhaps the most serious fault of parliamentary democracy, from the point of view of democracy itself, is its inherent tendency toward centralism. At one extreme of its political spectrum is the national state and at the other the individual voter, with a blank in between. The local bodies that may exist have (a) little self-government powers, and (b) no direct or indirect influence on the national state. Add to this the complexities of a highly industrialised civilization that are beyond even the understanding of the ordi-

1. Salvador de Madariaga, *Democracy Vs. Liberty*, p. 67.

2. Walter Lippman, *op. cit.* p. 42

nary citizen, and you have a central state of overwhelming power and resources and the individual voter reduced to abject helplessness. The 'sovereign people' being dispersed over the length and breadth of the country like particles of sand over the desert and having no other organised political force than the national state itself to interpose between themselves and that state, the latter naturally becomes all powerful. The issue of power in such state is decided not by the fictitious 'people' but by a balance between political parties and such organized interests as industrialists and bankers and powerful labour unions. The *people* represent a wholeness, while the organised interests are sectional. Even a *sum* of the sections cannot make up the whole. Only their *organic integration* can do so. Such integration takes place only in the community—at its various levels. In the communal or communitarian democracy that we are advocating there are a natural decentralization and a multi-central pluralistic state.

A natural outcome of centralization of power and administration is bureaucracy. The central executive or cabinet is so overburdened with work that it is compelled to leave more and more to, and depend more and more upon, the permanent officials, who in course of time gather more and more power for themselves. This soon leads to a dangerous autocracy, the autocracy of the bureaucrat, which is difficult to fight because it 'works in the shadows' and is hard to get at. The only answer to the problem of bureaucracy is more and more decentralization so that the people directly participate in the administration of their affairs and control the civil servants who owe their jobs and are directly responsible to them. This is exactly what will happen in the communitarian democracy outlined here. The communal administrations might make mistakes and there might be inefficiency.

But as they themselves will be the sufferers, they will learn and improve things. Moreover, during the British rule did we not say to ourselves repeatedly that good government was no substitute for self-government? Is that less true now?

(6) An inevitable concomitant of parliamentary democracy is the party system. So much has been written in criticism of this system that it seems unnecessary to dwell upon it here at any length. Some criticism of it has been implicit in what has been said above. It is clear that parliamentary democracy cannot work without parties. Parties of a sort will perhaps exist everywhere and at all times. Even in the family there may be 'parties'. In the ancient Indian republics, which were aristocratic democracies, parties and factions were a common feature. "Sri Krishna", writes Dr. Altekar, "who was the President of the Andhaka-Vrishni State, bitterly complains to Narada that he is not the master but the slave of the Central Assembly, as he has to listen patiently to the bitter criticism of the different parties."¹ To quote Dr. Altekar again, "Many of the Assemblies of the republics, like the Parliaments and municipalities of the modern age, were torn by party factions; in fact the Buddhist literature, the Arthasastra and the Mahabharata point out that family quarrels, party factions, lure of corruption, internal dissensions, and mutual recriminations among the members of the Assembly constituted the main weaknesses of the Gana (republican) states. Bhishma emphasises again and again that the danger from foreign invasion is not at all so great as the danger from the internal quarrels."² But the highly

1. A. S. Altekar, *op. cit.* p. 127

2. A. S. Altekar, *op. cit.* p. 128

organized, centralised mass parties of modern times are far cry from the factions of old, whether of the ancient India republics or the Greek city states. The old democracies were small and the factions and the people were not so far removed from one another. The people therefore could judge them and the issues that were raised with intimate understanding. The issues in those days were also simple enough. All this has changed now and parties have become a sort of state within the state. They are now the real arbiters of the people's fate, whose control over them is fictional. The citizens who cast their votes for the parties have nothing to do with the running of the parties: they are complete outsiders. Even the enrolled members of the parties have no say either in the policy-making or the inner administration of the parties. The parties are run by caucuses that are beyond democratic control. Says M. Maurice Duverger, "The organization of political parties is certainly not in conformity with orthodox notions of democracy. Their internal structure is essentially autocratic or oligarchic: their leaders are not really appointed by the members, in spite of appearances, but coopted or nominated by the central body; they tend to form a ruling class, isolated from the militants, a caste that is more or less exclusive."¹

Party rivalries, we have seen above, give birth to demagoguery, depress political ethics, put a premium on unscrupulousness and aptitude for manipulation and intrigue.

Parties create dissensions where unity is called for, exaggerate differences where they should be minimised. Parties often put party interests over the national interest.

Because centralisation of power prevents the citizen from

. M. Duverger, op. cit. p.

participating in government, the parties, that is to say, small caucuses of politicians, rule in the name of the people and create the illusion of democracy and self-government.

No doubt the party system has its good points and because parliamentary democracy cannot work without it, those, including M. Duverger whose indictment I have quoted above, who swear by that type of democracy and see no alternative to it, are prepared to accept the evils of the party system as inevitable and satisfy themselves by pointing out their virtues. For my part, *it is not the party system that is the main culprit, but parliamentary democracy itself*, which gives it rise. In the communitarian democracy that I have proposed here, there may conceivably be parties, but they are likely to be local factions, and, in any case, their role in the State will not be as commanding as that of the parties in the parliamentary system.

(7) *Another serious fault* of parliamentary democracy is the *system of election* that it fosters and requires for its proper functioning. First of all, the system is very expensive and appallingly wasteful. The fabulous expenses involved have the effect of mortgaging democracy to moneyed interests or large sectional organizations as trade unions. As compared with this the election expenses in the communitarian system would cost practically nothing.

It would have been a matter of some consolation if the huge expenditure had resulted in any public good. In fact, the result is just to the contrary. A general election, as noted above, creates unnecessary passion and excitement; instead of educating and enlightening the people it befogs their mind; instead of resulting in the election of able and good men, it tends to favour demagoguery. Serious political and economic issues and other questions of policy, it is obvious,

should be considered calmly and dispassionately and not in the heat of partisan warfare. That is why I agree with M. Madariaga that the practice of general elections should be abolished. The elected houses should be continuous in nature, with a part of them being renewed periodically.

CHAPTER 6 ECONOMY OF THE COMMUNITY

THIS is not the place to deal at any length with the Economy of the Community. For that a separate paper would be necessary. However, a treatment of the polity would be incomplete without a brief description of the economy that would underlie it. Society is a complex whole, as man himself is; and, therefore, social and human reconstruction requires an all-sided approach. That is why even though I have been concerned here only with the political aspect of social life, I have often digressed to consider other aspects also. Mr. Erich Fromm, one of the sanest of modern Western thinkers, writes, "Undoubtedly *one* step of integrated progress in all spheres of life will have more far-reaching and more lasting results for the progress of the human race than a hundred steps preached—and even for a short while lived—in only one isolated sphere."¹

(1) The aim of the community's economy is the welfare of the community and each of its members. Its aim cannot be individual profit, exclusive of the welfare of other individuals in the community. The community's economy is neither exploitative, nor competitive : it is co-operative and co-sharing.

(2) The community comprehends the whole of man and

1. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 1956, p. 272

I have reproduced in the appendix B, the whole remarkable passage.

is interested in his all-sided development. The life of the community is therefore balanced and not one-sided. The economy of the community must therefore be subordinate to, and subserve, the aim of a balanced development of human life. Therefore, it cannot be an economy of unlimited wants, as it is in the existing society. The present 'science' of economics, as Dr. Schumacher has observed, would be inapplicable to a balanced society. For it, a new science of Economics will have to be worked out. In this country Gandhiji and Shri J. C. Kumarappa have laid the foundations of such a new Economics.

(3) The community is an enlarged family, and like the family it represents the eternal flow of life. Just as the family is interested not only in its present members but even in those who are unborn, so the community thinks of future generations. Its economy therefore is *not wasteful*. It is particularly careful about the non-renewable resources of Nature which are being wasted at such a criminal rate by the so-called advanced nations of the world. *A balanced economy concerned with future generations of men, that is, with life rather than death, would try to do its best to return to nature what it takes from it.* It will therefore try to restrict consumption as far as possible to renewable resources and use as little as possible of the resources it cannot put back. The economy of the community is in co-operative harmony with nature, while present-day economy both of the West and East is at perpetual and destructive war with Nature. As Dr. Schumacher has put it :

"A civilisation built on *renewable resources*, such as the products of forestry and agriculture, is by this fact alone superior to one built on *non-renewable resources*, such as oil, coal, metal, etc. That is because the former can last, while

the latter cannot last. The former co-operates with Nature, while the latter robs Nature. The former bears the sign of life, while the latter bears the sign of death. It is already certain beyond any possibility of doubt that the "Old-Goal Metal-Economics" cannot be anything else but a short abnormality in the history of mankind—because they are based on non-renewable resources and because, being purely materialist, they recognise no limits. The frantic development of atomic energy shows that they know their fate and are now trying, through the application of ever-increasing violence against nature, to escape it. Atomic energy for 'peaceful purpose', on a scale calculated to replace coal and oil, is a prospect even more appalling than the Atomic or Hydrogen bomb. For here unregenerate man is entering a territory which, to all those who have eyes to see, bears the warning sign "Keep out."¹

(4) The *economy of the community*, further, should be as *self-sufficient* as possible. The idea of self-sufficiency, in this age of international trade, strikes many as parochial, isolationist, reactionary. But for the community it is most natural. The primary concern of the community is to provide for satisfaction of the primary needs of its members. It is therefore natural for it to produce all it can to provide for them food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life. It is also the community's responsibility to see that every able-bodied individual in the community finds useful employment. But if the economic activities of the community are not primarily related to its needs, the community would be at the mercy of the market—not only national, but also the international market—which may spell unemployment and

1. Appendix A.

(6) This would naturally set the *pattern for planning*. *Planning would begin from the primary community* and therefrom fan outwards. In our scheme of things the regional plan, i. e., the plan of the regional community, would be the pivotal plan. This would mean that the regional plan—and not the village plan, which would be too small for the purpose—would be the *unit* out of which the whole national plan would have to be constructed. The existence of large, unbalanced cities would complicate communitarian planning, and necessary adjustments would have to be made. The towns would, of course, be integrated with the regional, and district communities. But the integration of the cities would be difficult. It will be recalled that I have already suggested that as far as possible the cities should be re-constituted as federations of communities.

(7) *All natural resources would belong to the community*. How they would be divided between the communities would be decided upon by common agreement. Generally speaking, each community would have possession of the natural resources that falls within its boundaries. But there are resources that are unevenly distributed such as forestes, mines, etc. These would have to be shared by all by common agreement.

It follows that land would belong to the community; and, in the nature of things, each primary community would own the land that falls within its area.

(8) *Great economic inequality is inconsistent with the spirit of community*. Up to a point difference in income or wealth may be tolerable. Vionobaji gives a homely illustration to drive this home. He gives the example of the five fingers of the human hand. They are unequal, but the inequality is reasonable; so that, in spite of it, the fingers can cooperate

and work together. But if the difference had been too great, so that one finger was only a few inches long while the next was measured in feet, the hand would have been utterly useless.

(9) In the community, the position of the *worker* would be *central*, because it would be realised that *work* was *the most essential thing* required for the community. Without work the community could not exist. Therefore, *every adult* in the community *would be a worker*. At the same time, work would be a "meaningful expression of human powers, rather than meaningless drudgery", because the worker would be a responsible participant in the work process. There would be no over-specialization tending to reduce the worker to an automaton. Rather, the agro-industrial nature of the communal life would make it possible for him to follow a diversified occupation.

In this connection M. Madariaga has an interesting observation to make. He writes, "What, in fact, 'do the workers want?' I asked one day of a Spanish syndicalist leader; and he replied 'Not to be a workman'. He adds, "That, I think, is the true root of the labour question;..... In his heart of hearts he (the industrial labourer) feels that it is not a question of obtaining such and such an advantage for his class, but that his class should not exist at all. His instinct tells him that the working class is not a natural class in the social body: that, if it were healthy, social nature would not of itself produce a working class; and that there had to be a deviation artificially imposed on human society by economism and mechanism in order to arrive at these two cancers—the factory and the urban concentration." And after a most interesting discussion he concludes thus, "When all is said and done, it is a question of transforming the life of the work-

er by means of three revolutions : he must be given a taste for, and the possibility of, *creative power*; *variety* must be given to his work, and he must be brought back to his home. This triple aim could be achieved in the following way :

“His working day should be reduced to four hours;

“He must be installed in a house with sufficient land for himself and his family to be able to add to his earning at the factory by the sale of produce from his land.”

I hope that when it is realised that Salvador de Madariaga is a modern European intellectual living at Oxford and not a village-idolising Gandhian of India, the weight of his words would be properly appreciated.

(10) A few words about the organization of industry, commerce, etc. I have already stressed the *agro-industrial character* of the communities—as opposed to purely agricultural or purely industrial. I have also stressed the need for a new kind of technology, “adapted to the scale of man.”

A social organization and technology of the kind proposed here would assure that the bulk of industrial and other economic institutions would remain confined within the region and district. There would be some institutions of provincial, and a few of national dimensions.

(11) These institutions might be of the private, co-operative or communal type. In the primary, regional and district communities a large part, may be the greater part, of industry and commerce would naturally be of the *owner-worker type*. The rest would be co-operative or communal. A few units might be of the private-employer-employee-type. The provincial and national undertakings would be of the co-operative, communal or even private type.

(12) Perhaps a word of explanation is necessary about the *communal undertakings*. They would be undertakings

every institution would be directly integrated with the immediately present community. In the other communities, some such pattern of integration as the following might answer the purpose. This, however, offers a wide field for experimentation.

In each communal area (region, district, etc.) each *line* of industry, or of other business, would be organised in an Association, representing owner-workers, other workers and owners, managers and technicians. That is to say, in each region, district, province and the country there would be different Associations of, let us say, iron-workers, carpenters, oil-men (or of their cooperatives); of grain-dealers; of factories making agricultural implements, batteries, etc.

These Associations would be federated in each communal area into an Economic Council. In this manner, each region, district, province and the country would have its own Economic Council. The Economic Council of every community would advise and be represented in, the communal political body concerned (the Panchayat Samiti, District Council, etc.)

The Associations and Councils would have powers to make rules to govern their activities and of their member institutions, provided these rules did not conflict with the rules and laws of the community. These Associations and Councils would be the modern *varna* organizations and their rules the modern *varna-dharma*.

(16) A word about private enterprise. *Private enterprise*, in the sense of *purushartha*, the individual's spirit of enterprise, would have fullest scope in the community, for the reason, among other things, that the "the individual" as Madariaga so well expresses it, "is far more of a creator

than the State" or any other collectivity for that matter. But, in the community the individual would be imbued with the spirit of community. Therefore, *private enterprise* in a communitarian society would also partake of that spirit and *work for private as well as communal good*. Further, private enterprise would also be subject to the principles of self-government and responsibility to, and integration with, the community.

(17) It may be asked if all this would not conflict with the *directive principles of the Constitution* and the ideals of socialism to which Parliament stands committed. On the contrary, I feel emphatically that it would be only in the kind of society described here that those principles and ideals could find fulfilment.

This is not the place to examine at any length the ideals of socialism as defined by its great teachers. But, it might be useful to cast a rapid glance over them. For this I shall draw liberally from Erich Fromm.

Modern socialist thought might be said to have begun with Charles Fourier. This is how Fromm sums up his thought. "Against the universal organization of great monopolies in all branches of industry, he postulates communal associations in the field of production and consumption, free and voluntary associations in which individualism will combine spontaneously with collectivism. Only in this way can the third historical phase, that of harmony, supersede the two previous ones; that of societies based on relations between slave and master, and that between wage-earners and entrepreneurs."¹

About Robert Owen, another land-mark in the history

1. Erich Fromm, op. cit. p. 249

of socialism, Fromm writes, "A new social order must be created, in which men are trained in principles that would permit them to act in union, and to create real and genuine bonds between individuals. Federal *groups of three hundred and up to two thousand persons* will cover the earth and be organized according to the principle of collective help, within each other, and among each other. In each community, the local government will work in closer harmony with each individual."¹

The thinking of Marx was complex, and, as with Gandhiji, it appears as if he has said contradictory things. Marx's thought developed at a time of great social and political upheavals, and Marx reacted to them. He also attempted a vast synthesis of thought which alas could not be completed. The result of all this is that sometimes Marx appears to be a 'centralist,' at other times a 'decentralist,' sometimes again to be a 'humanist' and at other times a 'commissar'. However, it is well-known what great importance Marx attached to the Paris Commune. His writings about it were most seminal and belong to the classics of socialism. Mr. Fromm writes, "In his address to the General Council of the International on the civil war in France, Marx stressed the necessity of decentralization, in place of a centralized State power, the origins of which lie in the principle of the absolute monarchy. There would be a largely decentralized community. 'The few, but important, functions still left over for a Central Government were to be transferred to communal, *i.e.* strictly answerable officials.....The communal constitution would have rendered up to the body social all the powers which have hitherto been devoured

1. Ibid, p. 250

Commission); and co-operativization of rural economy. But from the point of view propounded in this paper these programmes suffer from several serious defects : namely, (a) they lack an integrated social philosophy; (b) they have no clear concept of community; (c) they do not aim to create a balance within the community between agriculture and industry; (d) even though the aim is to create communities (no matter how vaguely understood) at the bottom level the concept of social organization at the higher levels remains the same as that of the atomised industrial society of the West (which for our purpose here includes Russia).

Let me deal briefly with each of these defects.

(a) The social philosophy, granting that there is one, behind the country's development programmes may be said to have two parts: (i) the philosophy of economic development; (ii) the philosophy of democratic socialism.

No one in this country will question the need for economic development. But should that development be *without limits* as in the West (again, including Russia)? Should we develop our economy for power or for peace and happiness? Should "economism" rule over our lives or the need to develop the whole man? There is no need to repeat here what has already been said in this connection, but it is necessary to understand that the social philosophy motivating our development programmes at present is the same as rules Western (and Russian) society. That philosophy, as we have seen, is incompatible with the out-look of community development and the communitarian order of society.

As for democratic socialism, there seems to be no clarity of thought. Democratic socialism in the West has come to mean, in practice though not in theory, state socialism.

And if it has any philosophy, it is that of a *top-down* from the top and not of a socialist way of life lived in every house and neighbourhood. If socialism and welfare from *below* are to be the ideals of our social reconstruction, development of the community at the bottom has neither any social significance, nor any chance of success. The base and the super-structure will contradict each other; and because the top will be all-powerful—as it must be under State socialism—the superstructure will undermine the base. It will be remembered that the Soviet system had started out to be something of a communitarian system, but because the top became all-powerful, the bottom was crushed out of existence. There are no true Soviets in Soviet Russia: there is one monolithic State.

As I have shown above, socialist philosophy need not be opposed to the communitarian picture drawn here. But in that case, socialist will have to be less interested in *institutions* and more in *man*. The old faith that state ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange *plus* planning will bring about socialism has been abandoned. In its extreme form that faith led to Stalinism. But a new faith has not been created to take the place of the old. For this the socialists will have to go to the pre-Marxian Greek idealists, the philosophical Anarchists, to Tolstoy, Ruskin and Morris; to the post-Marxian social idealists; to Gandhi and Vinoba. The “communities of work” of India have a great deal to teach the socialists; and so have the kibbutzim of Israel and some of the *gramdan* villages of India. The socialists must also take from Marx what is not valid and from science the best it has to offer. This task will require a vast capacity for moral and intellectual synthesis, but the task has to be undertaken if socialism has to recapture its

pristine inspiration and idealism. Marx, as Lenin pointed out, had synthesised German philosophy, French socialism and British classical economics to create his grand and noble structure of thought. Another moral and intellectual genius must arise to perform anew a similar creative act of synthesis so that socialism might become a faith for the future rather than one of the "wasms" of the past.

(b) The concept of community is not clearly worked out. To the extent it is, it remains on paper: mainly for the reason that the task of "development" of the community is given to *paid "servants"* of the State who have generally no faith in, or understanding of community; and *who themselves do not belong to any community*. In the communitarian form of society the concept of *belonging* to a community is very important. In Switzerland, for instance, where the community still exists every Swiss *belongs* to his *home commune*. "The Swiss has no less than three citizenships, Swiss, cantonal and communal. The citizenship of his commune is not the least important. It is inalienable, like the two others. It remains with the family and its descendants, even though they may have been domiciled for a very long time at some other place. The home commune is the last refuge of the Swiss..... As a rule, too, it is the commune of origin and not the commune of domicile which must support the indigent."¹

The official 'developers' of community have not such concept of belonging, and that is one reason why their efforts do not go very far. It might be added here that though the Indian village is far from being a community,

1. Hans Huber, *How Switzerland is Governed*, p. 16

its inhabitants do have a sense of belonging to their village and to one another. The sense is weak in all conscience, but it is there. The programmes of community development and the officers in charge do little in practice to strengthen this sense. The programme has been laying more emphasis on developing agriculture and industry and building schools, hospitals, community centres, approach roads, etc. than on developing the *spirit* of community. The latter is a more difficult task, but it has to be tackled to make community development meaningful. For this a clearer picture of community has to be prepared and popularised—not because the official ‘circular from above’ requires it, but because of inner conviction.

The *local community* should be so developed that it becomes a *miniature welfare state*. Being the primary community it must take primary responsibility to provide work and shelter for every family; to organise production so as to fulfil the primary needs of food and clothing, to provide for primary education and primary health services. The needy and the indigent should be a first charge on the community, and every earning member of the community, no matter where residing, must contribute his share to the primary social service needs of the community. Every family living in the community, while working for its own welfare must keep the welfare of every other family in view. The economic resources and activities of the village must have the welfare of the community as their first charge. It is these things that should signify community development above all else.

(c) The Community Development and other rural development programmes have no conception of *balanced agroindustrial communities*. There is no doubt that village in-

dustries are being developed but that is only from the point of view of tackling the unemployment problem and raising the living standards of the villagers. There is no idea behind the village industries programme of a new type of socio-economic organization; or, perhaps it would be more correct to say that the idea behind it is that of an atomised society sharply divided between urban and rural sectors with the first dominating the second. Apart from all philosophical considerations of social reconstruction, it should be emphatically pointed out that if the latter concept of society persists, the villages of India are sure to be perpetuated as permanently depressed areas.

(d) This defect has already been partly considered in (a) above. It was shown there that if the superstructure was to be individualistic there was no meaning in trying to establish community at the base. In such a society the atmosphere of community will be lacking, without which it will be impossible to sustain the basic communities.

Let me elucidate this by taking an example. Let us take the political institutions. It is a common observation that village panchayats do not function as they were intended to. There may be several reasons for this. But I am sure that one of the most important reasons is the divisive influence of the existing atomistic polity. An attempt is being rightly made to see that panchayat elections are as nearly unanimous as possible and that parties do not project themselves into them and the villages function as communities. At the same time, at elections to higher bodies the same village communities are split again into individuals who have to line up behind conflicting parties. The result is that the community is disrupted and the panchayat is unable to function in the wholesome manner that every one desires.

It is the same with the economic and other institutions

and activities. Our planning, for instance, does not begin with the village and the region and go upwards, but from the centre, going downwards. This does not help to develop the communities because they are not given an opportunity to plan for themselves as communities and then to coordinate their plans from level to level. The economic institutions, State or private, are also top organisations whose activities are in the nature of economic 'invasions' from outside the community, tending to dislocate and disintegrate the communal life. So on and on.

II

So much about the defects of present programmes of community development. Let me return now to the foundation of our polity. *The foundation, as stated already, must be self-governing, self-sufficient, agro-industrial, and rural local communities. The highest political institution of each community should be the General Assembly or the Sabha—of which all the adults should be considered members. The selection of the Executive—the Panchayat—should be by general consensus of opinion in the Sabha. There should be no 'candidates', i.e., no one should 'stand' for any post. There should be clear-cut qualifications, as in ancient times, laid down for all selective posts. No individual should hold the same post for more than a defined period of time. The panchayat should function through sub-committees, charged with different responsibilities. There should be no official or member appointed or nominated by the State government in the panchayat or its sub-committees.*

It may be questioned if there can ever be a general consensus of opinion amongst villagers who are divided into castes and factions and have conflicting interests. We

have seen already how for thousands of years the villages of India elected their executive councils by general agreement. Those villages were by no means homogeneous and ideal communities. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the experience of centuries can not be repeated again. We may also recall that the *only alternative method of election* of village councils or panchayats was that of *drawing lots*. *There is nothing undemocratic in selection by lots* and we have seen how in such highly developed and cultured and well-governed villages as the *agrabara* village of Uttarmerur in South India, this system worked so well. Therefore, *I am emphatically of the view* that the villages should be given an option to choose between the *methods of selection by general agreement or by drawing lots* or, alternatively, it might be provided that the villages first try the former method, and failing therein take recourse to the latter. Something similar happens in the Bhoodan movement. When the landless families are unable to agree amongst themselves about the distribution of Bhoodan lands between themselves, the issue is decided by drawing lots. It is not our experience

that there has been in any case dissatisfaction with decisions reached in this manner.

The question may also be asked if the village panchayats, as they are today, would be able to function in the manner visualised above. There is no better way to teach the young except by giving them responsibility. In the same manner the only way to make the villages self-governing, self-reliant and self-sufficient is to throw upon them real responsibilities. *There was a time* when the Indian village republics were *self-created*, like the Swiss communes, and their powers and functions were not given to them from above. *But in the present conditions they have to be re-created by a deliberate*

and bold process of devolution and decentralization, if Indian democracy has to have a firm base and living reality. I believe that the responsibility given to the gram sabha and the panchayat should be in things that really do matter. For instance, it should be the responsibility of the gram sabha and its panchayat to ensure that no one in the village went without food, clothing and shelter; no child went without primary education; every one received primary medical care. The sabha and panchayat should see that the village became self-sufficient in the matter of food and clothing as soon as possible. Further, they should so plan that within five years, let us say, there was no unemployment in the village and every family reached a minimum standard of living. Self-government, to be real, should be about essential problems of life.

It would be necessary for some time to help the village from above, but the responsibility must be clearly defined and the demand for help must come from the village in specific terms, meant to supplement what has been or is proposed to be done by the collective effort of the village. No help should be given until the village has proved that it has done and is prepared to do its best to help itself. Eventually such help will have to come from the next larger communal organization, the regional community, but at the beginning it will have to come from the State government. Social and political workers must go in large numbers to the villages, not to make promises but to preach self-reliance and to help them to practise it.

III

The development of the rest of the polity need not wait till the villages and townships become real communities as

visualised here. *Our work must begin at all levels simultaneously*, otherwise it will not succeed at any level.

The next level of the political structure would obviously be that of the regional community. Here, as already indicated, the gram panchayats will have to be integrated into the Panchayat Samiti, as recommended by the Balvantray Mehta Team, with this difference that the nature and functions of the Samiti should be those of an autonomous self-governing community as discussed in the previous chapter: the Samiti should have powers and obligations to do all that may be within its competence. As suggested already, the panchayat samiti, comprising the optimum community as defined above, would play a key role in the political and economic life of the country, particularly in the processes of planning and development.

There is one important point which I wish to emphasise in connection with the *formation of the panchayat samiti*. *The samiti should be elected by the gram panchayats and not by their members*. This at first might appear to be a distinction between six and half-a-dozen. But that is not so. We have here a major principle of communal life involved. It is the gram panchayat *as a body* that represents the village community and not its members. The panchayat samiti, in its turn, is a representative of the gram panchayats, and it is the latter that should be represented as such and not their members. As M. Madariaga says, discussing the interrelationship between Municipal Councils and County Councils, "Gathered together, *organised* in one institution, *i.e.*, the Municipal Council, the Municipal Councillors could not be re-dispersed again to elect the County Council. The county is a federation of municipalities, since the County Council is a federation of Municipal Councils. The voting

*units which elect it must therefore be the institutions of which it is composed."*¹ (Italics mine.)

Following the pattern of social organization described in the previous chapter, the political structure would rise storey by storey from the foundation.² The next storey above the panchayat samiti would be that of the District Council (or whatever name be given to it), which will be formed by the integration of the panchayat samitis of the district—again the samitis, as such electing their representatives and not their members. The district councils, in their turn, should have all the powers and obligations necessary to do everything that may be within their competence.

In a similar manner all the district councils of a State would come together to create the State Assembly. The State Assemblies, in like manner, would bring into being the Lok Sabha. Thus the political institution at each level is an integration of all the institutions at the lower level.

We saw in the last chapter that the pattern of social organization described therein was akin to the pattern that Gandhiji himself had visualised. It should therefore be

1. Salvador De Madariaga, op. cit., p. 63.

For elections to the Municipal Councils (gram panchayat in our case) Madariaga has advocated families as voting units. I wholly agree with him in principle, but because I have advocated in stead of election, selection by general consensus or drawing lots, it is immaterial who the voting units are.

2. This heirarchical structure, as indicated in the last chapter, should not be interpreted to mean that the "higher" organizations will dominate the lower. At each level the organization concerned is autonomous and the "higher" bodies derive their powers from the fact that the institutions "below" them, in effect, entrust them with certain authority in order that they might be able to do what the lower bodies themselves find to be beyond their competence.

no wonder that the political organization pictured above also accords with Gandhiji's view. It will be recalled that at the Round Table Conference Gandhiji had advocated indirect elections and drawn upon the pattern of the Congress organization to illustrate what he meant. This is what Gandhiji had said:

"We have something analogous to the Central Legislature in the Indian Congress Committee. We have also provincial bodies analogous to the provincial legislatures, and we have also our own tin-pot legislation and we have also our administration. We have got our own Executive..... Let me tell you that our provincial councils have got full authority to frame bye-laws in order to govern their elections. The corner stone, namely, the qualifications for voters, they cannot change at all, but all other things they can in their own way.... I will take only one province where this thing is done. The villages elect their own little committees. These committees elect the taluka committees (taluka is a sub-district) and these taluka committees again elect the district council, and the district councils elect provincial councils. The provincial councils send their members to the Central Legislature, if I may so dub this All-India Congress Committee."¹

Gandhiji added, "I have simply given you an outline of the scheme. It can be filled in if it commends itself to your attention. If we are going to have adult suffrage I am afraid we shall have to fall back upon a scheme somewhat after the style that I have suggested to you.... Under this scheme I cannot conceive the possibility of a candidate having to spend Rs. 60,000 over an election or even one lakh. I

1. The Nation's Voice, pp. 17-18

know of some cases in which the expenses have run to one lakh of rupees, in my opinion an atrocious figure for the poorest country in the world.”¹

It appears from the discussion that followed Gandhiji's speech that he was not clear about the details of his scheme, but was firm and emphatic about its general outline.

Two other distinguished sons of India had long ago put forward a similar idea. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Dr. Bhagwan Das in their 'Outline Scheme of Swaraj' which had been placed before the country in 1923, had thus formulated the essential principles of Swaraj:

“The principles which guide this outline are those which have been honoured in India from time immemorial, and have been reiterated in the Presidential Address of the Gaya Congress, in December, 1922, thus :

To form a scheme of government, regard must be had,

(1) to the formation of local centres more or less on the lines of the ancient village system of India;

(2) the growth of larger and larger groups out of the integration of these village centres;

(3) the unifying state should be the result of similar growth;

(4) the village centres and the larger groups must be practically autonomous;

(5) the residuary power of control must remain in the Central Government, but the exercise of such power should be exceptional, and for that purpose, proper safeguards should be provided, so that the practical autonomy of the local centres may be maintained, and at the same time, the growth of central government into a really unifying state may be

1. Ibid, p. 18

possible. The ordinary work of such Central Government should be mainly advisory.”¹

Before proceeding further I should like to point out that the fore-going discussion should show that the issue is not merely one of ‘local’ self-government, nor of direct or indirect elections. It would be wrong to suppose that if ‘local bodies’ were given more powers and the direct system of election were replaced with an indirect one, and the rest of the social organization were left as it is, the resultant would be the kind of polity that is being advocated here. The polity herein suggested is not a graft on the existing body of society, but an organic part of a radically transformed social order.

IV

My aim here is not to write a new Constitution for India. I have tried merely to discuss some underlying principles and to indicate the general pattern of the social and political organization. However, it may be useful to deal with a few points of detail by way of further clarification.

First, let me take the question of the *Executive at the different levels*.

At the *Primary Community* level the *Panchayat* is the executive : it might allot different executive functions to its individual members or to small committees.

At the *Regional Community* level, the *Panchayat Samiti* is the executive body and it would function through committees.

At the level of the *District Community*, the *District*

1. C. R. Das & Bhagwan Das, *Outline Scheme of Swaraj*, p. 7

Council would be the executive body, and it would also function through committees.

At the level of the Provincial Community, the Pranta Sabha would appoint committees which would be the executive bodies, responsible to the Sabha.

Likewise, at the level of the National Community, the Rashtra Sabha would appoint committees which would be the executive bodies, responsible to the Sabha.

Who would exercise the legislative powers, it may be asked. According to my conception, each community has powers to make rules and laws in order to manage its internal affairs, provided they do not conflict with the interests of other communities *at the same level* and with the rules and laws laid down *by the communities at higher levels*. *The higher communal bodies will legislate in their allotted spheres*. Rules and laws may be passed by other communal bodies too, such as educational and economic associations.

The committees should be small, workable bodies with powers to co-opt experts who would participate fully but without the right of vote.

Each committee would have a chairman and a secretary, but, apart from performing the functions of their office, they would enjoy no special powers or privileges.

Each committee would be directly responsible to the general body which would appoint it.

In order to coordinate the work of the different committees, there would be a Co-ordinating Committee, constituted of one representative from each committee: the representative may be the chairman, secretary or any member of the committee as decided upon from time to time by the committee concerned. The decisions of the Coordinating Committee would be binding on every other committee.

Up to the district level, the co-ordinating committee would be the panchayat, the panchayat samiti and the district council, which would meet at fixed times.

Every committee would have collective responsibility.

The representative communal bodies would meet periodically, but the committees would be in perpetual session.

Matters of policy would be decided upon, on the motion of a committee or an individual member, by the representative bodies concerned. The committees would execute the policies.

It should be clear from this that at the Provincial and National levels there would be no Ministers, Chief Ministers or Prime Minister as at present. As stated above, *government would be conducted by committees* of the representative bodies. The institution of Prime Minister and Chief Minister, which concentrates too much power into the hands of single individuals is *undemocratic* and smacks of the gun-powder of totalitarianism. It further leads to such dangerous psychological developments as the 'hero-cult' or the 'cult of the individual'.

The President of the different representative communal bodies will have no administrative functions. But it would be his responsibility to see that the representative body of which he is president functions properly and according to the rules laid down. He would also have extraordinary emergency powers in case of the break-down of the democratic apparatus of the community concerned.

The President of the Rashtra Sabha, in addition to the powers mentioned in the last para, would also be the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and responsible to the Sabha for the defence of the Nation. He would be assisted by a committee for defence, of which he would be the chairman.

In their task of administration the Committees would be assisted by paid Civil Servants. *At each level the civil servants would be appointed by the corresponding Authority* created for that purpose by the representative body concerned and on terms laid down by the latter. This will be a *sovereign right of the communities: to appoint and dismiss its servants*. At the level of the primary community the civil servant might be an honorary, part-time or full-time volunteer. Even at higher levels there might be honorary civil servants.

It should be pointed out here that because of the centralised pattern of the social, political and economic organization, the administration would not be top-heavy and far-removed from the people as at present.

In the light of the above, it might be useful to turn for a moment to what is perhaps one of the most serious problems of the present day: the *problem of bureaucracy and corruption*. Some think that one solution of corruption is dictatorship. But even dictatorship is no solution of bureaucracy. To the contrary, we know that dictatorship breeds bureaucracy faster than other systems of government, and, in the bargain, makes it all-powerful.

Even as regards corruption, it is not generally realised that there is corruption on a gigantic scale in the dictatorships—only its form is changed. In stead of corruption in the sense of bribery and the like, there is grosser corruption in the form of lying, deceit, intrigue, terror, enslavement of the human mind, crucification of the dignity of man. All this corrupts human life far more than bribery and similar things.

The only true solution of the problem both of bureaucracy and corruption is direct self-government of the people and direct and immediate supervision and control over the civil servants

of administration are *to be entrusted to which community*. I have emphasised the general principle that every community would have powers to do all that may be within its natural competence. Since there is general inertia among the people at present, this may not be much. Powers would have to be '*given*' from above. I should therefore say that I would take courage in both hands and give to the communities the utmost powers possible. Some of the powers might not be used, some might be abused. But the people would learn and it would be the job of the voluntary social workers to help them to learn.

I should therefore say that police, justice, taxation, collection, social services, planning, should all be decentralised to the maximum possible extent. As the people learn and acquire self-confidence, the process of decentralisation, instead of starting from above, would be normalised and begin to operate from below.

V

A new political structure like the one envisaged here will not be built in a day, if for nothing else, for the reason that the foundation will have to be laid first and the structure built from below, storey by storey. The economic structure too would have to be built along with. All this would take time, so there will have to be a period of transition.

Village panchayats have been established in the greater part of the country. These have to be remodelled according to the principles put forward in this paper.

The next stage would be the establishment of Panchayat Samitis. This has also been started already, such as in Rajasthan. But again the conception behind it has to be radically changed.

When panchayat samitis are established, the District Councils would have to be constituted.

The economic institutions would also have to be organised side by side.

Planning and the whole system of education would have to be re-oriented.

I have advocated the selection of village panchayats by common agreement or drawing of lots. Naturally, there is no scope for political parties to play any role in this process. As a matter of fact, even under the present system of election two major parties of the country have already agreed not to set up party candidates or village panchayat elections. I propose that the principle be extended by law to the higher bodies too—up to the District Councils in the first instance. Under an indirect system of election, when the primary electoral units—the village panchayats—have a non-partisan character, there would be no sense in introducing parties into elections to the panchayat samitis and district councils. Besides, partisanship militates against the spirit of community that we wish to create and the process of harmonisation that we wish to introduce into the life of society.

It is possible that before we reach the district level throughout the country, the General Election of 1962 would intervene. If communitarian polity is accepted as our goal, *it would be necessary to take steps so that the General Election does not thwart, distort or make difficult the progress to that goal.* Now, there is no doubt that if the parties 'fight' the elections in the usual manner, every village would again be politically disrupted and disunited, doing incalculable harm to the development of the *community*. The panchayat samitis and district councils, elected on a non-party basis, would also be divided into partisan factions again doing irreparable harm

to their work as harmonious communal bodies, endeavouring to serve the community impartially.

At the same time the party system exists and there are parties, whose main function is to fight elections. Obviously, therefore, a compromise will have to be made.

The first step should be for the parties to reach an agreement that the village panchayats, the panchayat samitis and the district councils, wherever they are constituted, would be scrupulously kept out of the election.

The appropriate electoral colleges not being in existence, it would have to be the individual voters who would participate in the election. But, as a compromise, I propose that *instead of parties setting up candidates, the voters themselves should be enabled to do it*. A year ago I had made a similar proposal in a speech to Members of Parliament on September 23, 1958. This is what I had said:

"Suppose in a constituency, let us say there are 300 booths. For each booth, let us say, there are 2,000 voters. Before the elections, for the purpose of setting up of candidates, let meetings of the voters be held in each booth area, not necessarily at the station where the booth is going to be established, but at any convenient place in the booth area. Let the voters meet and let them elect two delegates as they do in Yugoslavia. There is nothing sacred about the number. I am making a suggestion. Let them elect two delegates by normal democratic procedure and majority votes. Then, afterwards, let all these delegates, may be 600 of them, hold a conference and let the nomination of the candidates be made at this conference. Let there be a law regulating that anyone can propose a name and second the name. The law may lay down that anyone whose name has been proposed and

seconded, if he receives a certain percentage of the votes, 25 percent, 30 percent or more—whatever be the number—is nominated as candidate by the delegates of the voters. Then those delegates do their campaigning. Before the selection of those delegates let no party go into the field and say, “So and so must be nominated”. No names should be mentioned. Let all the parties go to educate the public as to what sort of people should be nominated, what kind of policies, programme,—agrarian, industrial, foreign or whatever it is—should be followed. Let every party go and try to educate the public. If the parties perform merely the educative functions, they have a very wide function to perform in society. Let them do that in the pre-nomination period. After the nomination, because we have the party system, let us make a compromise..... Suppose the delegates’ conference has nominated three candidates or four candidates, let the parties choose out of those candidates and decide to give their support to one or the other just as parties decide about individuals. These are candidates of the people. They have been put up by the people of the constituency, not by any party caucus, whether it is local caucus or a State caucus or the All-India caucus. They are the nominees of the people. Then their names again go to the people for their votes. I think that if this practice were followed much of the evils of this party system would be remedied. May be a new avenue would be open to us to experience new forms of democracy.”

After the election, the members of the Legislature concerned would elect by majority vote a leader, who would be Prime Minister or Chief Minister. He would then form his cabinet.

This is merely a proposal for the transition. Any other

method might be followed keeping in view the picture of the new polity.

VI

The picture drawn here of the polity for India, and of social organization in general, might perhaps appear to be idealistic. If so, I would not consider that to be a disqualification. An ideal cannot but be idealistic. The question is if the ideal is impractical, unscientific or otherwise ill-conceived. I have tried in the preceding pages to show that all relevant considerations lead irresistibly towards it.

The achievement of this ideal would, however, be a colossal task. Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of voluntary workers would be needed over number of years to accomplish it.

The governments should lend their full support; but it is necessary to remember that the main burden of the task would have to be borne by voluntary political and social workers and institutions. The heart of the problem is to create the 'spirit of community', without which the whole body politic would be without life and soul. This is a task of moral regeneration to be brought about by example, service, sacrifice and love. Those who occupy high places in society—in politics, business, the professions—bear the heavy responsibility of leading the people by personal example.

The task also is one of social engineering, needing the help of the State; of scientists, experts, educationists, businessmen, experimenters; of men and women; of young and old.

It is a task dedication; of creation; of self-discovery.

It is a task that defines India's destiny. It spells a challenge to India's sons and daughters. Will they accept the challenge?

APPENDIX A.

ECONOMICS IN A BUDDHIST COUNTRY

ALL life has an economic aspect. All men have material needs. It is neither wrong nor unworthy to devote thought and care to the satisfaction of these needs, to the economic aspect of life.

We must attend to the economic aspect of life if we wish to maintain life itself. So we must all be economists or materialists or good householders—upto a point. This is inescapable, and those who appear to escape it are merely putting the burden of their own existence on to the shoulders of others.

Governments, too, cannot escape the duty of attending to economic matters, simply because so much of the economic aspect of life is the economic aspect of living together. And it is the function of government to attend to the community's common problems. All actions of government have an economic aspect.

In view of this universality of the "economic aspect" it is not surprising, neither is it abnormal, that a "science", a systematic "body of thought," should have grown up, commonly called Economics. But one thing is surprising, and is indeed abnormal, namely, that there should be only *one* "science", only one body of thought, called Economics. Because people's ideas of the purpose and meaning of life vary very much; and when different people attach different meanings to life, this must inevitably affect also their ideas about any particular aspect of life. The whole is greater than any of its parts or aspects.

Well, let us say it straight out : What to-day is looked upon as *the* science of Economics is based on *one* particular outlook on life, on one only, the outlook of the Materialist. Every concept of Economics is rooted in this outlook. Even where Economics admits that man does not live by bread alone, it counts as "cost" any activity that fails to cater for material wants. Economics distinguishes between "productive" and "unproductive" activities, and only those are called productive which in one way or another, directly or indirectly, cater for material wants. Not that Economics had failed to concern itself with "Welfare". But even welfare is a term completely rooted in materialism—although in a slightly more subtle fashion.

This one-sidedness of Economics is surprising and indeed abnormal. Yet it is understandable all the same. For two reasons : first, because *up to a point*, as I have said, everybody is inescapably concerned with material, economic things, if, indeed, he wants to live in a becoming way. *Up to a point* therefore, Economics is about life as such, irrespective of any ideas of meaning and purpose. The second reason is of an altogether different kind : Economics as a science has arisen only in the West and at a time when Western Materialism ruled supreme throughout the world. Non-materialists have been too weak, so far, to think these matters out from their own point of view. And it is one aspect of their continuing weakness that they have thoughtlessly and all too easily accepted the spurious claim of Western Economics to be the only possible body of economic thought, to be final, and objective, applicable to all men at all times.

Because Economics, *up to a point*, can rightly claim universal validity, it has been accepted as possessing universal validity throughout. What do I mean by '*up to a point*' ?

The essence of Materialism is not its concern with material wants, but the total absence of any idea of Limit or Measure. The materialist's idea of progress is an idea of *progress without limit*. I quote from an official report relating to Burma :

"There is no known limit to possible improvements in materials, methods and products. Improvements in methods go on year by year... The standard of living increases as a result, year by year and decade by decade. Each generation is better off than the one before. Every man can look forward to the prospect that his children will live better than he did, and his grand children better than his children. This must come about in Burma also. Burma must become a progressive nation, so that her people not only live better in 1960, but look forward to continued improvement, without limit."

This is not progress *up to a point*, but progress *without limit*. Is this compatible with Buddhism or Christianity or with anything the Great Teachers of mankind have proclaimed? Of course not. It is compatible only with the most naked form of Materialism.

Economics, as taught today throughout the world—*in front of the iron curtain and behind*,—recognises no limit of any kind. It is therefore the Economics of Materialism and nothing else. There is implicit in it a purely materialist view of life, and it is inseparable from this view of life.

When, then, shall we get a system of thought that could be called Buddhist Economics? When will people at least realize and understand that the Economics of Materialism is not of universal validity, that any ordering of life in accordance with its precepts will be utterly incompatible with, and inimical to, the Buddhist way of life? When

will the teachers of economics begin to be at least objective enough to tell their students that the Economics of present-day teaching is the purest form of Materialism and leaves no room for anything other. When will they take cognizance and admit that other systems of Economics are possible and necessary and are even already available in rudimentary form ?

I can here mention only one such teaching, propounded by the greatest man of our age, Mahatma Gandhi. Are the professors and students of Economics even aware of Gandhi as an economist ? And yet he had much to say on economic matters; he has laid the foundation for a system of Economics that would be compatible with Hinduism and, I believe, with Buddhism too. His economics were derived from the concepts *Swadeshi* and *Khaddar*. This is what he said about *Swadeshi* :

“In your village you are bound to support your village barber to the exclusion of the finished barber who may come to you from Madras. If you find it necessary that your village barber should reach the attainments of the barber from Madras you may train him to that. Send him to Madras by all means, if you wish, in order that he may learn his calling. Until you do that you are not justified in going to another barber. That is *Swadeshi*. So when we find that there are many things that we cannot get in India we must do without them. We may have to do without many things... It has been urged that India cannot adopt *Swadeshi* in the economic life. Those who advance this objection do not look upon *Swadeshi* as a rule of life. With them it is a mere patriotic effort, not to be made if it involved any self-denial. But *Swadeshi*, as defined here, is a religious principle to be undergone in utter disregard of physical discomfort caused to individuals... Much of the deep poverty of India is due to

the departure from *Swadeshi* in the economic life. If not a single article of commerce had been brought from outside India she would be today a land flowing with milk and honey."

The vow of *Khaddar* is to spin with one's own hands and to wear nothing but home-spun garments. These are Gandhi's words :

"You may ask, 'Why should we use our hands ?' You may say : 'Manual work has got to be done by those who are illiterate. I can only occupy myself with reading literature and political essays.' We have to realise the dignity of labour. If a barber or shoemaker attends a college he ought not to abandon his profession..."

And this is what a Western visitor of the Mahatma's Ashram had to say :—

"When we thought of the whole atmosphere of the place and the ideals for which it stands—the joy of the workers in their work, the happy, contented homes, the education available to the children, the absence of any anxious thought for the morrow—our hearts ached to think that we were to leave it all so soon. Here, more than ever before in our busy lives, have we felt the truth of the words 'Laborare est orare'—to labour is to pray."

It is not my purpose here to argue that *Swadeshi* and *Khaddar* are necessarily the right and only possible growing points for a system of ideas that would deserve the description of Buddhist Economics. But do you see that this *is* Economics and that it is in many ways diametrically opposed to the Economics of Materialism ? Do you see the difference between "To labour is to pray" and "Labour is an item of cost—a disutility" ? At this stage, when the non-materialists are still so very weak and so very trusting, it is merely

my concern to plead with the professors and students of economics—and with the statesmen as well—that they should study and listen to the Mahatma's Economics with as much attention as they now give exclusively to the Economics of Materialism.

This is what I read in a leading article in 'The Burman' not so long ago :—

“Our National Adviser is a European, our Pilot Service is still occupied by Europeans. The Captain of the 'Pyidawta' is an Englishman. In specialised work for sometime to come, until our people are capable of running them, we need the help of foreigners. Even the Economic Adviser to the Government must yet and for a long time be a foreigner.”

The Nautical Adviser, the Pilots, and the Captain, indeed, are all doing 'specialised work', unaffected by their view of life. But is the same true of the Economic adviser ? It may or it may not be so. Far be it from me to suggest that it is wrong for Burma to employ foreigners as economic advisers ; there is a certain type of competence in the economic field of which Burma is still short and which foreigners can supply. But please do not for a moment imagine that Economics is just another type of “specialised work.” Economics means a certain ordering of life according to the philosophy inherent and implicit in economics. The science of economics does not stand on its own feet : it is derived from a view of the meaning and purpose of life—whether the economist himself knows this or not. And, as I have said, the only fully developed system of economic thought that exists at present is derived from a purely materialist view of life.

Let me give one or two examples. If you ask an economic expert to advise you on the structure of freight rates—

the charges to be levied by the Railways, Inland Water Transport, and so forth—he may be inclined to advise that the rates per ton/mile should ‘taper off’, so that they are the lower, the longer the haul. He may suggest that this is simply the ‘right’ system, because it encourages long-distance transport, promote large-scale, specialised production, and thus leads to “an optimum use of resources”. He may point to the experience of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, etc.—all ‘advanced’ countries employing just the “tapering device.” Do you see that in doing so he would be recommending *one particular way of life*,—the way of Materialism? An ‘economic expert’ steeped in Gandhian Economics would undoubtedly give very different advice; he might say : “Local, short-distance transportation should receive every encouragement; but long hauls should be discouraged because they would promote urbanisation, specialisation beyond the point of human integrity, the growth of a rootless proletariat, in short, a most undesirable and uneconomic way of life.” Do you see that “Economics does not stand on its own feet?”

Or you ask an economic expert what the country should do in order to avoid foreign exchange difficulties. Now one expert may advocate the maximum development of exports—“to gain all the advantages of the international division of labour.” Another expert may advocate certain restrictions on imports— “So that the country should not be at the mercy of all sorts of unpredictable disturbances in world markets”. There two experts may argue with each other,—but do you see that they are not arguing about economics but about a way of life? And so I could multiply examples.

When, then, will someone get down to it and develop

a system of thought that would deserve to be called Buddhist (or Christian or Gandhian—Ed.) Economics ? This is a very urgent need. Let no one conclude from what I have said that nothing could be done, or nothing should be done, for the economic development of Burma; that all development would necessarily clash with and undermine the Buddhist way of life. It is the type and direction of “development” that I am talking about. If you want to become materialists, follow the way shown by Western Economics; if you want to remain Buddhists, find your own “Middle Way.”

To find this way, I suggest, it will be necessary to start by defining certain “limits”. Material things are of real importance—for a person, a family, or a nation—only “up to a point”. So we can distinguish three economic conditions : misery, sufficiency, and surfeit. Of these, two are bad—for a person, a family, or a nation—and only one, sufficiency, is good. Economic “progress” is good only to the point of sufficiency; beyond that, it is evil, destructive, uneconomic. These distinctions will be the most important of all for the type of Economics I am thinking of.

Next in importance comes the distinction between “renewable” and “non-renewable” resources. A civilisation built on renewable resources, such as the products of forestry and agriculture, is by this fact alone superior to one built on non-renewable resources, such as oil, coal, metal, etc. That is because the former can last, while the latter cannot last. The former co-operates with Nature, while the latter robs Nature. The former bears the sign of life, while the latter bears the sign of death. It is already certain beyond any possibility of doubt that the “Oil-Coal-Metal-Economics” cannot be anything else but a short abnormality in the history of mankind—because they are based on non-renewable reso-

APPENDIX B.

“CHRISTIANITY has preached spiritual renewal, neglecting the changes in the social order without which spiritual renewal must remain ineffective for the majority of people. The age of enlightenment has postulated as the highest norms independent judgment and reason; it preached political equality without seeing that political equality could not lead to the realization of the brotherhood of man if it was not accompanied by a fundamental change in the social-economic organization. Socialism, and especially Marxism, has stressed the necessity for social and economic changes, and neglected the necessity of the inner change in human beings, without which economic change can never lead to the “good society.” Each of these great reform movements of the last two thousand years has emphasized one sector of life to the exclusion of the others; their proposals for reform and renewal were radical—but their results were almost complete failure. The preaching of the Gospel led to the establishment of the Catholic Church; the teachings of the rationalists of the eighteenth century to Robespierre and Napoleon; the doctrines of Marx to Stalin. The results could hardly have been different. Man is a unit; his thinking, feeling, and his practice of life are inseparably connected. He cannot be free in his thought when he is not free emotionally; and he cannot be free emotionally if he is dependent and unfree in his practice of life, in his economic and social relations. Trying to advance radically in one sector to the exclusion of others must necessarily lead to the result to which it did lead, namely, that the radical demands in one sphere are ful-

filled only by a few individuals, while for the majority they become formulae and rituals, serving to cover up the fact that in other spheres nothing has changed. Undoubtedly *one* step of integrated progress in all spheres of life will have more far-reaching and more lasting results for the progress of the human race than a hundred steps preached—and even for a short while lived—in only one isolated sphere. Several thousands of years of failure in “isolated progress” should be a rather convincing lesson.”

Erich Fromm

(The Sane Society, p. 272)

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